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SA's gym partner Virgin Active meets its best IT Partner yet in Mimecast

International health and wellness Group, Virgin Active seems fitter than ever following one of its 'best ever' IT investments in Mimecast's mail management solution.

Context

A globally renowned brand, established by the charismatic Sir Richard Branson, Virgin is synonymous with innovative and daring ventures that push the boundaries.

Virgin Active, a division of the international Virgin Group, offers health club and wellness services to members in the UK, Spain, Italy, Namibia and South Africa - its largest operation with over a hundred gyms nationwide.

Challenge

Virgin Active South Africa has been a long-standing Lotus Notes user for years. In 2011, the business initiated the process that would enable its migration to a Microsoft-based platform.

With Lotus Notes such an integral part of its infrastructure (the LDAP alone dates back more than a decade), doing away with it altogether was never an option. What was needed was a technology partner that would be able to navigate between the two.

Besides the migration, there were a number of other mail-related challenges that needed resolution.

"Email is a critical part of our operations," explains Andre Mostert, Virgin Active's Head of IT Operations. "We have several thousand employees between our head office, call centre and our more than one hundred clubs countrywide. Those at club level spend most of their time away from their desk, engaging with members. To enable our hours of operation, many work shifts. Email is our most convenient and reliable communication channel internally, and is also an important part of our external engagements."

This large user base coupled with a complex mail environment makes for a mammoth management task. Virgin Active employed two full time resources to deal with the day-to-day administration of its system.
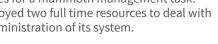
AT A GLANCE:

Company
- Virgin Active Health Clubs South Africa (www.virginactive.co.za)
- Industry: Health and Fitness
- Number of Email Users: Several thousand

Objectives
- Support the adoption of a Microsoft-based environment (while maintaining underlying Lotus Notes infrastructure)
- Improve functionality (security, continuity, compliance, archiving)
- Enable an electronic communications standard for the business

Benefits
- Significantly simplifies email management
- Creates visibility into a vast email environment
- Has nearly eliminated spam
- Ensures mail continuity and compliance
- Supports brand building for the group

The business experienced frequent outages, making uptime – or lack thereof - problematic. "Many of our employees reverted to private Gmail accounts to keep communication open," explains Mostert. "This was not ideal risk-wise given the sensitivity of correspondence and the compliance demanded by our business. It also eroded our control of the environment when it comes to e-discovery, as these mails fall outside of our domain."

Solution

Besides an excellent product offering and an attractive integration with both Microsoft and Lotus Notes, Mimecast's flexibility and eagerness to please were important contributing factors.

Mimecast worked with Virgin Active in tailoring a solution that fit its unique user demographic. The outcome is a set of user profiles that offers just the right level of services to each group, without compromising on security or compliance.

Mostert was impressed with the whole implementation, from initial negotiations to actual deployment where customer satisfaction remained top of mind. "The team was fully committed to getting us up and running as quickly and as seamlessly as possible, resolving the issues at hand with minimal red tape."

Benefits

Virgin Active continues to be swept off its feet. Since deployment in November 2012, the business has enjoyed 100% uptime within its mail environment, something unheard of before. "The system offers the kind of electronic communication standard that a global organisation like ours needs, simply and effectively," says Mostert. "And the culture of innovation and support exhibited by Mimecast as whole keeps our relationship engaging and relevant."

"The system is intuitive and almost manages itself," says Virgin Active South Africa's IT Production Manager, Amanda Rust, who spent hours each day dealing with mail-related issues before Mimecast's deployment. "The reporting tools are simple, yet provide access to rich, tangible information that the business is able to act upon. We now have a far deeper understanding of our

mail environment as a whole. We have also been able to redeploy our human resources to more strategic, business-centric projects."

"We were also blown away by the security features," says Mostert, who admits that prior to the Mimecast deployment, Virgin Active had no idea just how significant the impact of spam was on its system. "While we knew it was an issue, particularly given the number of users we have, it was only when we could monitor the number of 'unproductive' mails clogging inboxes that we understood the full extent of the problem. Literally 1000s of mails are eliminated on a weekly basis with no drain on bandwidth or time. We have total confidence in the security of our environment, which supports our compliance needs as well."

Productivity (and related ROI) of IT resources are further enhanced by Mimecast's e-discovery capabilities, something Virgin Active relies on heavily for resolving disputes both internal and external. "Before, we had to track a single thread of correspondence through several systems in order to create an appropriate communication trail. This could take hours or even days," says Rust. "Mimecast integrates all these repositories, including those in Lotus and streamlines this process to a matter of minutes, without having to be referred to an administrator."

Perhaps the best indicator of the project's success? Mostert's affirmation that if given the choice, he would make the same decision again – and again.

> "Our investment in the Mimecast was money well spent. I would even go so far as to say that it is one of the best decisions that I have ever made as an IT Manager."
>
> - Andre Mostert
>   Head of IT Operations
>   Virgin Active (South Africa)

Mimecast makes business email and data safer for thousands of customers and millions of employees worldwide. Founded in 2003, the Company's next-generation cloud-based security, archiving and continuity services protect email and deliver comprehensive email risk management.