



Florida's Pasco County Government Relies on Mimecast to Comply with State Laws on Public Records Searches

Cloud-based email archiving solution reduces search times from weeks to just hours

Arcane email archiving procedures made it impractical for county administrators to quickly fulfill public records requests, prompting its IT team to find a new solution.

Context

Located on the Gulf of Mexico in the Tampa Bay area, Pasco is part of a nine-county region referred to as the "Nature Coast." Pasco County has a total of 742 square miles with more than 100 square miles of managed recreational facilities. The 2000 employees of the Pasco County Government serve Residents, Businesses, Visitors and Employees.

At a Glance

Company

- Pasco County (FL) Government (www.pascocountyfl.net)
- Industry: Government
- Number of email users: 1500

Objectives

- Fulfill public records requests in a timely manner
- Eliminate disk space required for storing PST files
- Accelerate process of email restores for users
- Reduce the size of users' inboxes

Results

- Time required to fulfill public records requests reduced from weeks to hours
- IT team efficiency improved by one third
- SAN and cluster reductions will free up storage space and reduce the need for future hardware expenditures
- Eliminated need for Exchange restores for email users

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Kristine Johnson - Enterprise Technology Manager, Pasco County

Challenge

Pasco County Government is subject to a Florida statute called the Sunshine Law that requires government entities to comply with public records search requests in a timely manner. However, email archiving and retrieval difficulties made that extremely challenging.

The County IT team utilized PST files for archiving, and each day created a single file containing all of that day’s email for more than 1500 email users. An IT team member would burn the file onto two identical DVDs and then drive them to vaults located on opposite sides of the county.

Each vault contained hundreds of CDs and DVDs. When a public records request came in, an IT staffer would have to retrieve the appropriate CDs and DVDs from a vault, make copies and then extract each PST file and manually search for relevant emails.

Since many requests spanned multiple months, the searches could take many weeks.

Under the County policy, the first 24 hours of labor required to fulfill a request were free, and after that the County could charge the petitioner for the time. An estimate had to be provided up front, and unfortunately, the estimates were often so high that citizens chose not to proceed.

“Our County Administrator takes the Sunshine Law very seriously, and he felt that our inability to complete these requests quickly was not in keeping with the spirit of the law,” says Kristine Johnson, Enterprise Technology Manager at Pasco County Government. “He tasked the IT team with finding a way to accelerate the process, so that we could fulfill public records requests involving archived email at low or no cost.”

Solution

Johnson and her team knew that an automated email archiving solution would solve the problem, and bring several associated benefits; namely, eliminating the disk space required for storing PST files, accelerating the process of email restores for users, and reducing the size of users’ inboxes.

“There were three paths we could take,” recalls Johnson. “An in-house tool, an appliance or a cloud-based solution. The amount of email we needed to archive made an in-house solution very complex and expensive due to storage costs. We found the same problem with appliances.”

“We quickly came to the conclusion that a cloud-based service was the best way to get all of our robust needs met without doing all the work and taking on the expense ourselves,” she says. “At first we thought the cost was out of our reach, but Mimecast made it surprisingly affordable.” In fact, Johnson says, “Mimecast was able to meet all of the County’s requirements at less than half the cost of the next-highest bid.”

Benefits

Time required to fulfill public records requests reduced from weeks to hours.

According to Johnson, it used to take weeks (or days, at a minimum) to fulfill a records request. Now, most can be done in less than eight hours, even with extremely complicated search criteria. All of the County’s email is securely stored in the Mimecast cloud, and searches are near instant.

“Before Mimecast, our cost estimates for many searches were in the \$4000-5000 range,” says Johnson. “Now all requests are fulfilled for free. Since implementing Mimecast, IT has not charged one penny for labor to perform public records searches.”

IT team efficiency improved by one third.

The County’s IT help desk – tasked with supporting 2000 County employees – is also responsible for helping to complete public records requests. The staff numbers only four, and Johnson says that prior to implementing Mimecast, the equivalent of one full-time person was dedicated to public records requests.

She recalls one court-mandated search that took one employee two months of full-time work to complete. That same type of search could be completed in Mimecast in just a few hours. “Having that fourth person back working on help desk issues essentially increases our productivity by one third,” says Johnson.