

George Washington University Law School Making a Case for Messaging Services

“THE OLD EMAIL SYSTEM WAS LIKE A WEIGHT HANGING OVER OUR HEADS. NOW WITH MIRAPPOINT, IT'S NOT EVEN ON OUR TOP TEN LIST OF THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT.”

Mike Briggs, Director of Information Technology, George Washington University Law School

CASE STUDY | EDUCATION

THE GEORGE
WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON DC

BUSINESS NEED

Improved performance and simplified management

SOLUTION

Mirapoint Message Server

BOTTOM LINE

Mirapoint delivers a high-performance, easy-to-manage, reliable messaging solution

Background

Established in 1865, the George Washington University Law School is the oldest law school in the District of Columbia, and one of the largest in the country. The campus is located in the downtown area of Washington, D.C. in an area known as Foggy Bottom. The school is ranked among the top 20 in the United States and has 1800 students plus 300 faculty, adjunct professors, and staff. The school offers alumni free email accounts for life, bringing the total mailboxes supported to about 9000.

The Business Need

George Washington Law School had been using a webmail-based email system running on Windows for several years when, in 2001, the supplier decided to exit the email business. Customers were directed to migrate to Ipswitch iMail, another webmail-based email system running on general-purpose Windows servers.

By 2004, the Law School's iMail system was experiencing serious growing pains. Enrollment was increasing and users were being allowed to keep their accounts after graduation, pushing total email accounts to more than 7800. Anywhere from 2000 to 4000 users were logged on at any given time. An expanding volume of large attachments was causing the mail store to mushroom. Users were experiencing slow response and deteriorating performance. Perhaps the most frustrating issue for users was the short, half-hour average session times. If a user had a new message open and went to send it after the session terminated, they would lose the entire message.

From an administrative perspective, system management was resource-intensive and, according to Briggs, “every patch was an adventure. If you are continually troubleshooting the email system, you are allocating resources to something that's not being productive.”

George Washington University Law School

The Mirapoint Solution

By early 2004, performance and management issues had reached the breaking point. "I saw our admissions numbers for 2004-2005 and decided I didn't want to go through this another year," recalls Briggs, who began looking for an alternative. "We considered Microsoft Exchange and Communicate, but both run on Windows and I didn't want to run a general-purpose operating system."

He then turned his attention to purpose-built solutions. "We had had positive experiences with an appliance-based intrusion prevention system in the past," says Briggs, "so one of our criteria for email was an appliance solution. We wanted something that was easy to manage."

About that time Briggs saw a magazine ad for Mirapoint. "It seemed to have the features we were looking for." An extensive evaluation process was conducted, including a search of newsgroups and talking to other schools with Mirapoint systems. In addition, Mirapoint provided a demo unit. "We saw firsthand how easy it was to maintain," says Briggs.

With a small IT staff responsible for a wide range of systems and technologies, Briggs didn't want the responsibility of maintaining desktop email clients. "To do that the web client has to be fairly rich," says Briggs. "That was one of the things we liked about Mirapoint."

There was one additional factor that led Briggs to select Mirapoint. "They were the only ones who would consider a migration from Ipswitch iMail. Mirapoint said, oh yeah, we've done that before."

The School contracted Mirapoint Professional Services to manage the migration. Two Mirapoint M4500 Message Server appliances were installed: a primary and a failover. Briggs and his staff created the Active Directory and a "wizard" for users while the professional services team performed the integration tasks. "We did a slow migration in the background. Then one night we did one final synch and threw a switch and it was done in half an hour," recalls Briggs. The migration was completely transparent for most users.

In 2007, the School upgraded its Mirapoint M4500 Message Server appliances to M5000s running on a Mirapoint-supported storage area network (SAN). "The ability to expand the solution rather than buy big in the beginning was one of the key reasons we chose Mirapoint," says Briggs.

The SAN configuration enables Briggs to store message data wherever he wants. It also provides fully automated disaster recovery through N+1 failover. Should the active server fail, the standby server takes over, enabling continuous access to SAN storage with minimal effect on users.

The Bottom Line

The migration to Mirapoint M5000 Message Servers was just as smooth and trouble free as the original Mirapoint deployment and, like the earlier implementation, performance has been excellent, with zero downtime since the installation. Faculty and staff continue to take full advantage of the calendaring and scheduling features of the Mirapoint system and, in mid-2007, these features are being offered to students and alumni as well. Storage limits have been increased to 1 Gigabyte per email account.

The move from Ipswitch to Mirapoint made management orders of magnitude easier. Before Mirapoint, nearly everyone had a hand in trying to keep it up and running. Now it's a part-time job for one person. "The old email system was like a weight hanging over our heads," says Briggs. "With Mirapoint, it's not even on our top ten list of things to worry about. And since we installed the M5000 Message Servers, management has gotten even easier."

Average session times now are approximately 12 hours, compared to the half-hour session times before. And if the session does time out while a user has an email to send, Mirapoint saves the message.

The school deployed Mirapoint's anti-spam and anti-virus solution, replacing software from Barracuda. "Mirapoint's Layer-2 implementation provides better performance than the previous solution and is working very well," says Briggs. "I don't get any spam."

About Mirapoint

Mirapoint® is the market leader in appliance-based solutions for secure message networks in enterprise, service provider, and education organizations, with more than 115 million mailboxes served and secured worldwide. Customers use Mirapoint appliances including the Message Server mail appliance and RazorGate mail security appliance to build the messaging infrastructure that intelligently serves, secures and manages email. Mirapoint is headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, with offices throughout North America, Europe and Asia. For more information on Mirapoint, visit its Website at www.mirapoint.com.

Configuration

- Two Mirapoint Message Server M4500 appliances



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