

Streamlining software services delivery - Australian IT services giant uses EMS-Cortex to deliver corporate email service



Software as a Service (SaaS) has redefined computing. It has forced software vendors to re-architect their applications and presented software service providers with a massive business opportunity. However, allowing customers to use remotely hosted applications in the manner to which they are accustomed is driving software service providers to re-evaluate their own delivery systems. Service delivery must be quick and seamless. In the race for market leadership, the difference between winning and losing is as much about the software itself as it is about the management tools providers use to automate service provisioning and delivery.

"Different customers want different levels of control and Cortex gives us the flexibility to do that."

Duncan Strong, Messaging & Collaboration Product Manager, WebCentral

In planning the launch of its Corporate Exchange hosted messaging service, WebCentral, Australia's largest web and application hosting company and a key brand within the global Melbourne IT Group, required an enterprise-grade command and control system to manage provisioning and delegated administration for large customers and partners. To complicate matters, the solution had to work in both multi-tenanted and dedicated hosting environments. EMS-Cortex was selected for its ability to deliver on all counts.

SaaS opportunities abound

Despite the rampant uptake of Web 2.0 applications and communication, email is still king of business communication. However, a shortage of competent Microsoft Exchange engineers has prompted some businesses to outsource email – an option once unthinkable when first promoted in the 90s under the application service provider (ASP) model. How times have changed. The increasing popularity of outsourcing and success with hosted POP mail and hosted Exchange services in the small-medium business sector spurred WebCentral to launch a hosted service to the corporate sector.

Targeting corporates with 100 seats or more, WebCentral knew there was latent demand from companies who didn't want to manage their own email infrastructure, but still wanted to retain a degree of control. Addressing these needs turned the spotlight to its administration application. Duncan Strong, WebCentral's messaging and collaboration product manager, says the platform, which was originally designed for companies with up to 100 seats, wasn't going to do the job for corporates. "More than simply supporting rapid customisation and delivery, it had to underpin an evolving services roadmap."

Automating service provision

WebCentral's Corporate Exchange email service is now live. EMS-Cortex automates the provisioning process and end-user delegation, through a single, easy-to-use control panel. It also provisions adjunct services, such as monitoring email capacity.

WebCentral administrators provision email services to business customers, specifying individual users, contacts, distribution lists and public folders. The Cortex platform also helps WebCentral to manage resellers – partners who on-sell the company's software services – letting them customise user interfaces with their own company's brand livery and access protocols. ▶

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In control

The success of outsourcing today rests on customers recognizing that by relinquishing control over the upkeep of their applications, they actually get more control when using them. This is where EMS-Cortex comes into its own, Strong says. "Different customers want different levels of control and the interface gives us the flexibility to do that."

The Cortex platform provides tiered administration, allowing WebCentral to manage client environments, without having to run custom scripts. It gives WebCentral clients the ability to retain day-to-day control and administer tasks, such as adding and deleting users, managing mailbox limits, and setting up user groups and distribution lists.

"We can demarcate our administration and control. The same flexibility is available to our resellers and their customers."

Duncan Strong, Messaging & Collaboration Product Manager, WebCentral

Digging deeper

Cortex also allows WebCentral to monitor underlying infrastructure, such as storage underpinning customer applications. It also builds a clearer picture of service delivery costs and presents new value-added hosting service opportunities. Strong says WebCentral will continue expanding its software services portfolio, and Cortex could be extended to other applications and supporting IT infrastructure. "It makes complete sense for most larger businesses to buy more of their business applications on a services basis". He says development is a two-way street, requiring joint input from both parties. "EMS-Cortex is happy to work with us on future development – something rarely offered by vendors, who often just expect us to fit into their framework." ■

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Highlights

Summary

The increasing popularity of outsourcing and success with hosted POP mail and hosted Exchange services in the small-to-medium business sector spurred WebCentral to launch a hosted service to the corporate sector. However, its existing administration interface lacked the functionality to provide the customisation and control demanded by larger organisations. EMS-Cortex provided WebCentral with an enterprise-grade command and control system to manage provisioning and delegated administration.

Additional information

- Established in 1997, WebCentral is Australia's largest web and application hosting company and a key brand within the global Melbourne IT Group, specialising in managed hosting solutions for SMB, corporate, government and enterprise clients with business critical web applications. Many clients have advanced security, performance, scalability or infrastructure requirements.

Key feature

- Cortex provisioning for Microsoft Exchange Server

Benefits

- Automated hosted service setup and provisioning, standardizing tasks and accelerating the delivery of services
- Systems flexibility allows WebCentral to delegate different levels of service management to customers
- WebCentral can monitor infrastructure underpinning customer applications, build a clearer picture service delivery costs, and present new value-added hosting service offerings
- Inbuilt flexibility allows WebCentral resellers and partners to customise interfaces and services
- Cortex supports multi-tenanting, allowing WebCentral to deliver discrete slices of the same application to a number of customers