

State of Arkansas

State Organization Boosts Constituent Services with Unified Communications

The Company

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is the state of Arkansas' largest agency, offering hundreds of services to more than 700,000 people each year. Faced with aging telephony infrastructure, rising toll and travel charges, and a strong desire to enhance communications and constituent services, the agency decided to deploy Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007 and Microsoft Exchange unified messaging. It turned to Aspect and its expertise to help ensure a quick and seamless roll out of Office Communications Server 2007 video conferencing and unified messaging capabilities to a select number of employees, and instant messaging, presence, and audio conferencing features to 7,500 of its workers. Three months after its deployment, the Arkansas DHS is already realizing a significant decrease in the cost of managing its communications infrastructure, and lower travel and conferencing expenses.

The Business Challenge

Based in Little Rock, the Arkansas Department of Human Services is the state's largest agency. It employs 7,500 people who manage an annual budget of \$3 billion and serve more than 700,000 people each year.

The department is involved in virtually every facet of life in the state, from overseeing the regulation of nursing home and childcare facilities to finding adoptive families for foster children, protecting abused and neglected children, funding the home-delivery of meals for the elderly, and operating the juvenile justice system. The Arkansas DHS also oversees services to blind Arkansans, helps develop volunteer programs, protects elderly Arkansans from abuse and neglect, and operates human development centers across the state, which serve the developmentally disabled and mentally impaired.

Like many other organizations, the Arkansas DHS was dealing with an aging telephony infrastructure. "Our old telephone system was in need of replacement," says J. Brooks Evans, IT security officer for the Department of Human Services. The agency had nearly 100 Private Branch Exchange (PBX) phone systems across the state of Arkansas, many of which were leased and required regular maintenance. "We were paying for adds, moves, changes, and maintenance, and didn't have the ability for a voice portal, voicemail or other features," Evans continues.

The agency was also looking to make it easier and less expensive for its employees, who are based out of 125 separate state and local offices and travel frequently to meet with each other and the families they serve. "We have a number of employees who are on the road, working with children, families and the elderly," says Evans. "We really wanted to give these workers the ability to communicate with their co-workers and participate in 'in-person' meetings via video and other capabilities from anywhere at anytime." In addition, the Arkansas DHS was committed to providing the hearing impaired members of its workforce with a real-time form of communication.

With the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the agency was receiving stimulus funding to help it develop sustainable strategies for service delivery to children and families. "Because of the stimulus funding, we were seeking a better way to get new facilities and temporary workers up-and-running quickly as the stimulus is for a very short period of time," Evans says. "Every day lost is one day less of getting those people working."

Confronted with a large number of atypical projects and a limited IT staff, the Arkansas DHS needed professional services support to implement a unified communications solution. In spring 2009, the Arkansas DHS selected Microsoft and Aspect to help it turn the potential of unified communications into real business results.



Benefits

Services Benefits

- Enables fast, seamless implementation, leading to quicker ROI.
- Provides path for future implementations.

Solution Benefits

- Integrates with existing infrastructure.
- Improves workforce mobility.
- Eases development, IT management.

Software and Services

- UC RapidStart from Aspect
- Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2
- Microsoft Exchange Server 2007

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IT Security Officer
The Arkansas Department
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The Solution

After evaluating several unified communications solutions, the Arkansas DHS selected Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007 for unified messaging and Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007 R2, which provides presence, instant messaging, conferencing, and voice capabilities. In addition, the agency decided to partner with Aspect® Professional Services for its implementation services.

Prior to the deployment in May 2009, Aspect Professional Services conducted strategy and design sessions with Arkansas DHS staff members. During this time, Aspect completed a current state analysis, helping the agency to develop a clear understanding of its existing environment. Aspect provided in-depth architecture, network planning and design workshops, where system architects led the Arkansas DHS through the design for the infrastructure, hardware, and software components of the new unified communications solution's architecture. As part of that process, Aspect consultants presented alternatives and worked with the Arkansas DHS to determine the final direction and ultimately provided an implementation plan created to ensure a successful deployment throughout the organization.

The Aspect Professional Services team implemented Office Communications Server 2007 R2, providing the Arkansas DHS with a number of features including attendant console, session initiation protocol (SIP) trunks, single-number access, and integration with Visual Studio at the programming interface level. In addition, Aspect deployed Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging, enabling users to access and manage email, voicemail and calendar data, from one, integrated inbox.

Next, Aspect integrated the Office Communications Server 2007 R2 voice functionality into the existing PBX system, using an Audiocodes gateway. This gave employees the ability to use instant messaging, presence, and voice over IP (VoIP) in addition to integrated audio conferencing. In addition, Aspect ensured that the incoming and outgoing call flows, including Enhance 911 (E911), were configured and working properly.

"I absolutely enjoyed working with Aspect," says Evans. "They were responsive, easy to work with and offered a pool of experience that you can't find in the Microsoft Knowledge Base or in books. They were also extremely knowledgeable about telephony integration, which was one of the more complex components of our implementation."

The Arkansas DHS is continuing to work with Aspect to deploy the video conferencing capability to a select number of users. Evans comments, "We have a number of employees that work in the field with foster children and other constituents. Our new, Web-based video conferencing capability is enabling those users to spend more time in the field and still participate in crucial staff meetings as though they are actually in the room with their co-workers."

Results

With the help of Aspect Professional Services' end-to-end consulting and implementation services, made possible by the Microsoft and Aspect alliance, the Arkansas DHS was able to develop a comprehensive unified communications strategy that focused largely on a unified messaging deployment, and roll that strategy out to its organization in an expedient and cost-effective manner. All 7,500 of the agency's employees are now using a communications solution to provide them with presence and instant messaging capabilities. Approximately 100 employees in the field office and central office are utilizing other features like voicemail, unified messaging, voice portal and response groups; and 725 employees who are out in the field are using video conferencing capabilities.

In the approximately three months since the deployment, the Arkansas DHS has begun to realize a return on its investment. Toll charges and infrastructure costs have dropped. Travel costs are falling, flexibility is increasing as employees gain the ability to participate in audio conferences from anyplace at anytime, and employee productivity and constituent services are improving as dispersed and hearing-impaired workers take advantage of video conferencing, IM, and screen and application sharing capabilities to assist one another, as well as for desktop support to troubleshoot problems for employees located remotely. In addition, Office Communications Server 2007 is providing temporary workers with immediate phone and data capabilities, allowing the Arkansas DHS to maximize the services it provides to Arkansans under the limited ARRA stimulus-funding package.

The agency also plans to continue deploying enterprise voice capabilities to 7,500 users as PBXs are retired and maintenance contracts expire. In addition, the Arkansas DHS intends to implement Microsoft speech services so that its constituents can easily access information using a self-service voice application.

About Aspect

Aspect is a global software and IT services firm specializing in applying Microsoft unified communications and collaboration to help customers achieve optimal results through enhanced business processes across the enterprise and in the contact center. Aspect provides IT consulting, integration services and business applications. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

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