



Home Security Leader Establishes Uniform Desktop; Boosts Productivity, Collaboration

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services

Customer Profile

Founded in 1983, Brink's Home Security (BHS) changed the security industry by making high-quality and affordable monitored alarm systems available to most homeowners. It also serves a growing commercial market.

Business Situation

BHS was running multiple versions of Microsoft® Office software, which complicated collaboration. The company also needed an e-mail environment that was familiar to new employees and more integrated with other programs.

Solution

BHS deployed Office Professional Plus 2007 to its office workers, and Microsoft Office Outlook® Web Access to its field employees. The company is also using Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 and Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007.

Benefits

- Easier and faster routine tasks
- Streamlined collaboration
- Integrated communications
- IT savings of 40 hours weekly, U.S.\$70,000 annually

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Rob Trotter, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Brink's Home Security

As a company specializing in technology-based solutions for residential and commercial customers across much of North America, Brink's Home Security takes pains to ensure that its own employees have the technology tools to help them work smarter. Toward this goal, the company has replaced three versions of Microsoft® Office suites on employee desktops with the 2007 Microsoft Office release. It also has replaced a Lotus Notes communications environment with the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2007 messaging and collaboration client and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007, and updated the company intranet to Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. As a result, the company has gained efficiencies from a standardized desktop, and employees are performing routine tasks faster, collaborating more efficiently, and enjoying the advantages of an integrated communications environment.



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Jill Meadows, Desktop Services Manager, Brink's Home Security

Situation

Brink's Home Security (BHS) markets, installs, services, and monitors security alarm systems for 1.2 million customers in all 50 U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, making it the second-largest provider of security alarm monitoring services for residential and commercial properties in North America. To maintain its leadership in the residential sector and grow its commercial business, BHS is continually seeking ways to help employees work more productively, particularly at the desktop level. In recent years, however, the company encountered problems in this regard, as its employees were running three different versions of Microsoft® Office suites: Office 2000, Office XP, and the 2003 Office release.

“Users loved the Office programs and were generally satisfied with the version they knew, but incompatibility among certain features hindered productivity,” says Rob Trotter, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Brink's Home Security. “This was especially the case for finance users, who were working with different versions of Office Excel® spreadsheets and workbooks and exchanging these documents frequently.”

Employee communications posed another challenge. For more than a decade, BHS had used Lotus Notes for its e-mail communications throughout the company. The application was less well known, however, by newly hired employees, who were far more familiar with the Microsoft Office Outlook® messaging and collaboration client from their prior places of employment.

“As a result, new employees had to devote some of their valuable ramp-up time to learning the e-mail user interface,” Trotter says. “This was time they could have spent learning more of the specifics of their new job.”

BHS also encountered resistance to Lotus Notes from prospective partners. “As a company that specializes in technology solutions that depend heavily on advanced software, we strive to have equally advanced software solutions internally, to make the most of our employees' time and talents,” Trotter points out. “But over the years, the software partners who help us develop such solutions made it clear that, because of integration challenges with Lotus Notes, they much preferred—and strongly recommended—that we use Microsoft Exchange Server and Office Outlook instead.”

Another communications challenge for BHS stemmed from the company's desire to update its intranet, which was originally based on Active Server Pages and was currently running on Microsoft Content Management Server.

As Yvonne Zagumny, Manager of Application Development, Brink's Home Security, explains, the intranet content could be updated or added only by IT staffers. To update or add content required a help-desk ticket process governed by Sarbanes-Oxley document-archival requirements, which was so cumbersome and time-consuming that these tasks were sometimes greatly delayed.

“At one point we had 1,000 pages of content, many of which were up to three or four years old,” Zagumny says. “To tackle updates and additions that simply could not be put off, development professionals were devoting nearly 40 hours weekly, and in some cases took this valuable time away from work on more strategic, vital business applications.”

In addition, the aging intranet lacked comprehensive search capabilities. To access a file, employees needed to know ahead of time where it was located. According to Zagumny, “Instead of using the intranet to find a file,

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employees often would consult with one another—hardly the best use of their time.”

Similarly, rolling out a simple new site on the previous intranet could sometimes take more than 80 hours, which meant that only the most strategic projects could be undertaken at all.

Solution

To address these challenges, Trotter and his colleagues decided to implement a major overhaul of their client-level IT solutions.

For one thing, they would replace the different versions of Microsoft Office software running on the company's desktop and portable computers with the 2007 Microsoft Office release. In addition, they would replace Lotus Notes with an e-mail environment based on Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 and Office Outlook 2007. Finally, they would migrate the company intranet from Content Management Server to Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007.

According to Trotter, a number of factors made such a migration ideal. “BHS is a long-time user of Microsoft products, and moving the intranet to SharePoint Server 2007 seemed like a natural progression,” he says. “We liked the future road map and direction that Microsoft offered, and we especially liked the plug-and-play integration provided by Exchange Server 2007 and Outlook 2007. This was the biggest motivation for our move away from Lotus Notes.”

Because the planned migration was so extensive, the deployment team invested a significant amount of energy in preparing employees through a companywide communication campaign. The campaign included access to tutorials for Office Outlook 2007 on the Microsoft Web site, user training through BHS's Microsoft Software Assurance licensing, online access to the Office Tips & Tricks

program, “lunch & learn” meetings with executive administrative assistants, and the distribution of a CD containing additional tips from Microsoft.

In addition, BHS ran its own “quick tips” program on the intranet site for a few weeks. Through this program, help-desk staffers posted a new topic daily to make the transition even easier for users.

As Trotter describes it, the communications campaign was needed only for educating future users of the 2007 Office system, not for persuading them of the value of the move. “Users understood the advantages of moving to the 2007 Office release and Outlook 2007 from the very beginning,” he explains. “In fact, when we first announced the move from Lotus Notes to Outlook 2007 at an all-managers meeting, we got a standing ovation and cheers.”

To minimize disruption and begin gaining value from the migration right away, BHS deployed the 2007 Office release and Exchange Server 2007 simultaneously, with the initial rollout to headquarters and subsequent rollouts to branch offices. In less than a month, the deployment team delivered the full Office Professional Plus 2007 suite to nearly 2,000 information workers, based largely at headquarters and branch offices, and Office Outlook Web Access to some 1,500 field-based employees, who are mostly call-center agents and service schedulers.

According to Jerry Bunn, Systems Administrator, Brink's Home Security, there was very little downtime during the transition. “We worked on weekends so that on Monday morning, employees arrived at work with the new solution completely ready to use,” he explains.

Following this deployment, the team began the migration of the company intranet to

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Figure 1. Office coordinators for Brink's Home Security branch locations have embraced Office SharePoint Server 2007.

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007. It plans to extend that migration to the company's public-facing Web site by late 2008.

Benefits

For Trotter and other members of the deployment team, the migration to Office Professional Plus 2007, Exchange Server 2007, and Office SharePoint Server 2007 has proven to be remarkably successful. From the beginning, Brinks Home Security experienced noticeable improvements in productivity, collaboration, and communications.

Easier and Faster Routine Operations

With all BHS information workers now using the same desktop productivity software, version-incompatibility problems are a thing of the past. “Sharing Excel spreadsheets and workbooks and other Microsoft Office documents is transparent now,” says Jill Meadows, Desktop Services Manager, Brink's Home Security. “No one is wasting any time having to reformat or resend because of compatibility problems.”

The Microsoft Office Fluent™ user interface has also been well received. “Users are all commenting on how much easier it is with the Office Fluent Ribbon to perform routine operations like opening, saving, closing, and printing documents,” Meadows reports. “Employees also are using SmartArt® graphics to create compelling presentations rapidly and easily.”

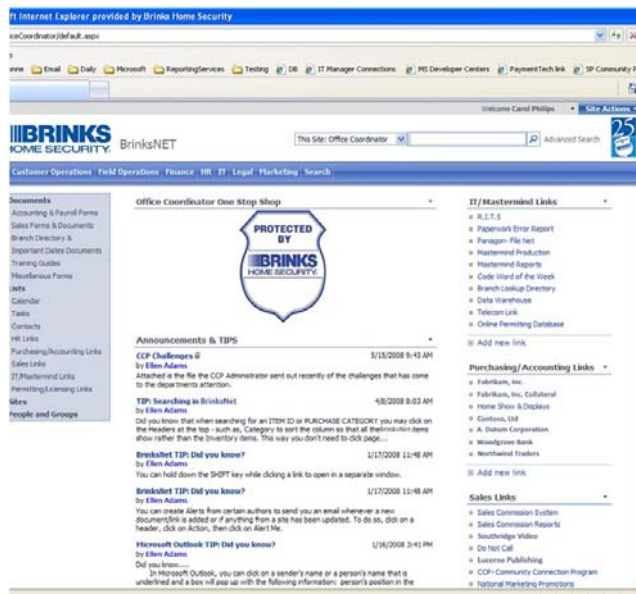
Streamlined Collaboration

In addition, BHS is streamlining collaboration, a key factor in worker productivity, with Outlook shared calendaring and the Save as PDF add-in to Office Professional Plus 2007. As Trotter explains, the Save as PDF option plays an important role at a company whose core focus is security.

“As a security company, we know that every document we share between offices, or with a customer or a partner, requires an extra measure of care to ensure that nothing has been improperly altered,” Trotter says. “For this reason, we prefer to distribute legal and financial documents, product and service documentation, and other potentially sensitive materials in a ‘locked-down’ form, and traditionally that has been as a PDF. With the Save as PDF capabilities in the 2007 Office system, we have a far easier way to do this.”

Tightly Integrated Communications

In addition to the productivity advantages of having a single version of the Microsoft Office suite on the desktop and the specific productivity and collaboration capabilities of the 2007 Office system, BHS is enjoying the overall business advantages of having a tightly integrated communications solution. As a result of replacing Lotus Notes with Exchange Server 2007 and Office Outlook 2007, the company now has an easy way to give employees comprehensive contact information for their managers and colleagues.



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As Terry Phillips, Manager of Network Services, BHS, explains, the company established this functionality by using the Active Directory® service in the Windows Server® 2003 operating system to deliver contact data to users through the Outlook 2007 corporate address book on the desktop. “As a result, employees can easily access basic contact information on coworkers and colleagues, including telephone extension, department, direct reports, and more,” he reports. “This is a far cry from what we had before, with Lotus Notes, when the information was scattered across various databases.”

A related benefit of the integration of Active Directory with Exchange Server 2007 and Office Outlook 2007 happens when an employee leaves the company. “We can use the same functionality to deprovision a departing employee quickly and securely, thereby strengthening security across the company,” Phillips says. “In the Lotus Notes environment, such rapid deprovisioning would have been practically impossible, as we had no obvious mechanism for pulling together the widely dispersed information.”

Another integration advantage made available through the migration to Microsoft products is the ability to integrate Exchange Server 2007 and Office Outlook 2007 with Microsoft Dynamics® GP and Microsoft Dynamics CRM business software.

“Through the integration of Exchange Server 2007 and Outlook 2007 with Microsoft Dynamics GP and with Microsoft Dynamics CRM, we can provide automatic e-mail notifications on changes in inventory or purchasing to employees who need the information right away,” Phillips explains. “This is a big step up from the manual approach we took in the past.”

IT Savings of 40 Hours Weekly, \$70,000 Annually

Through the migration of the company intranet to Office SharePoint Server 2007, BHS is similarly making vital information and announcements more easily accessible to employees. One form of such information is “hot topics,” which constitute an important segment of the overall content on the intranet. “Much of the ‘hot topics’ content is essential for enabling support specialists to provide better customer care,” Zagumny explains. “Now, the ‘hot topics’ and all other intranet content items are rapidly, easily updated by our business users without the need for any IT involvement.”

What this means, Zagumny adds, is that content updates or additions are no longer delayed, making the overall content of the intranet more timely. It also means that BHS is saving 40 hours a week in IT time, the equivalent of one full-time IT professional, and enabling those professionals to focus on more strategic pursuits, like the enhancement of line-of-business solutions.

This equates to a savings of roughly U.S.\$70,000 annually from freeing up one full-time resource to be allocated to work on other important projects that were previously out of scope due to budget and time constraints.

“We have a staff of office coordinators who support each of our branch locations, and under our previous intranet, these employees simply did not have a site and they relied on sending huge files to one another in e-mail,” Zagumny adds. “Now, using Office SharePoint Server 2007, we can easily create a simple site that contains everything that an office coordinator would ever need, such as announcements, tips, contacts, HR links, and more.”

Having based the BHS intranet on Office SharePoint Server 2007 also gives users vastly expanded enterprise search capabilities, fast and easy access to frequently used forms, and comprehensive contact information for colleagues. As Zagumny says, "Office SharePoint Server 2007 has made life easier for members of the development teams, removed a burden from the help desk, and enabled business users to make content available in a far more strategic and effective way than they ever could before."

Microsoft Office System

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