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James Lin, Systems Specialist, City of Mississauga

Mississauga leverages “hands-on” training from CMS Consulting to boost technical expertise and meet tight project timelines

The City of Mississauga is Canada's sixth-largest and fastest-growing major metropolis. With an eye on improving the level of service it provides to its citizens, the municipality recently underwent a technology refresh project that included new Windows-based solutions. Working under tight timelines, the City wanted to boost its technical knowledge of the new Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 SP1 system but wanted to avoid time-consuming training sessions. The City worked with CMS Consulting to deliver a customized training course that ensured IT staff were quickly and effectively trained on the new Exchange Server environment – learning just what they needed within a tight timeframe. The customized training helped the City speed up knowledge sharing, ensure staff better understand how best to leverage the technology, and shorten the total length for its training program from nine days to just six.

Situation:

The slogan for the City of Mississauga is “Leading Today for Tomorrow” and its dedicated staff of 7,500 municipal employees works hard to maintain this reputation. Today, Mississauga is a globally recognized hub for commercial activity, and is also home to 50 of Canada's Fortune 500 offices and more than 18,000 businesses.

A thriving metropolis requires a successful and reliable technology backbone behind it; the City recently engaged in a long-term strategic plan to enhance its IT processes and environment. This involved the migration to Microsoft-based business systems, including a migration of its Novell GroupWise email system to a communications and collaboration platform based on Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 SP1.

The City of Mississauga is committed to delivering quality municipal programs and services to its more than 700,000 citizens. In carrying out day-to-day business tasks, more than 4,500 internal City staff depend on email to work and share information quickly and efficiently. The previous GroupWise environment, however, couldn't scale to meet the City's growing needs.

“To meet the technology objective of the new strategic plan, we determined that moving to a Windows-based infrastruc-

ture from GroupWise would help to lower costs, centralize management and improve efficiency,” says James Lin, Systems Specialist, City of Mississauga.

However, to ensure a seamless transition from an aging legacy e-mail system to a Windows-based solution, the organization needed to quickly and effectively prepare and train its administrators to benefit from the new environment.

There was, however, a heightened sense of urgency as the IT department had to learn the new Exchange 2007 SP1 environment in time to meet the rigid timelines initially set out by the City for its overarching strategic initiative. The additional functionality of Exchange 2007 SP1 was not being offered in standard training courses at the time of the initial project implementation and staff needed to be trained quickly on the updated version. New functionality such as Standby Continuous Replication (SCR) and new Exchange 2007 features for high availability such as CCR, for example, required more emphasis for the City's administrative staff.

“There was definitely a sense of pressure around getting our IT processes up to speed and, coming from a purely Novell-based environment, we had very limited technical expertise with Exchange Server. To meet our city-wide growth plan, we needed to ramp up on Exchange 2007 functionality relatively quickly, especially SP1,” says Lin.

Fast Facts Customer: City of Mississauga

Website : www.cityofmississauga.ca



Customer Profile : The City of Mississauga is Canada's sixth-largest and fastest growing major metropolis.

Business Situation : With an eye on improving the level of service it provides to its citizens, the municipality recently underwent a technology refresh project that implemented and deployed new Windows-based solutions such as Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 to improve business collaboration and make communicating by email faster and more efficient for staff.

Solution : CMS Consulting delivered customized training courses to ensure employees were quickly and effectively trained on the new Exchange Server environment.

Benefits : Increased productivity, Improved return on investment, Seamless technology migration

Solution:

To ensure that staff could operate within the new Exchange Server SP1 email environment, the City worked with professional services firm CMS Consulting, a Toronto-based Microsoft Certified Gold Partner. Exchange Server 2007 SP1 delivers significant new features and administrative tasks related to managing client access and staff needed to get up to speed quickly to perform their day-to-day jobs.

CMS offers in-house and on-site software and systems *training*. In the case of the City of Mississauga, CMS involved the same consultants and field instructors who were engaged in the original Exchange Server implementation project to deliver the training – offering a more enriched and effective training environment. The senior consultant team at CMS, for example, worked closely with the City to develop customized training and knowledge transfer around the Windows-based technology.

“The hands-on sessions are designed to quickly provide IT staff and business personnel with the expertise they need to take advantage of new technology tools. CMS trainers are skilled field consultants with real-world experience, which helped to deliver a more accelerated and focused learning environment for City employees,” says Alex Chan, Vice President, CMS Consulting.

The hands-on CMS sessions provided a deep-dive overview of the new SP1 features – focusing on the specific differences from the previous legacy email platform. The aim of the course was to give staff the skills needed to provide access to services or data within an Exchange Server-based environment.

Benefits:

By leveraging customized IT training from CMS, the City of Mississauga is realizing a range of business benefits. Working under tight timelines, the City used the training to ensure greater user adoption and boost its technical knowledge of the new Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 environment.

Superior return on investment

Standard IT training courses typically take up to two weeks. Working with CMS, the City of Mississauga was able to reduce

the total length of the training program from an estimated nine days to just six. The flexible, intensive hands-on lab sessions helped IT personnel streamline costs and accelerate learning for a timely, cost-effective approach to IT training.

“Saving three days may not sound like a lot but it was mission-critical for the City to ensure that any training meant minimal disruption to normal operations. With this in mind, we were able to leverage a course that optimized knowledge sharing while allowing us to streamline training costs and effectively meet the timelines for our overarching strategic business plans,” says Lin.

Enhanced staff productivity

Members of the IT staff were at various levels of expertise with the Exchange Server 2007 solution and the CMS lab sessions were designed to ensure that everyone was learning at the same pace. This included delivering hands-on training to improve familiarity with the Microsoft-based technology. The course specifically focused on SP1 features and functionality, helping students to quickly benefit from a more enriched learning experience.

“What we really liked about the CMS training is that we didn’t waste time learning content that we couldn’t apply to our day-to-day tasks. It was simply a week of real world and practical information that ultimately helped us to do our jobs quickly and more effectively,” says Lin.

Improved technology migration

According to Lin, working with CMS ultimately proved to be a key component in ensuring a smoother transition to the Exchange Server-based email and messaging environment without disrupting normal operations for the City.

“You could tell that the sessions were specifically geared towards helping us quickly learn the ins and outs of our new technology environment. The course delivered specific real-world scenarios around Exchange Server clustering and SCR that our IT staff could immediately apply to their day-to-day jobs. This is huge for overall productivity,” says Lin.