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Akram Askoul, Director of information and communications technology
Niagara Regional Police Service

Niagara Police leverages customized “hands-on” training from CMS Consulting to boost collaboration and speed knowledge sharing and retention

Niagara Regional Police Service (NRPS) is dedicated to serving residents and visitors within the Regional Municipality of Niagara. In order to promote better collaboration between employees, NRPS recently underwent an upgrade of its IT infrastructure. The new technology environment includes Windows-based solutions such as Microsoft Exchange Server 2007, System Center Configuration Manager 2007 and Microsoft Active Directory. In order to get staff trained quickly and effectively, NRPS worked with CMS Consulting to develop customized “hands on” training sessions around the collaboration technology. As a result, NRPS was given the knowledge and skills to manage the migration and administer the technology. Today, NRPS is reporting that the custom on-site training provided by CMS has helped to reduce the total length of its training program by approximately 45 per cent.

Situation:

Located in Southern Ontario, NRPS has a rich history of delivering police assistance and public services to citizens and visitors of the Niagara Region. The region includes an expansive area with 12 municipalities, a population of more than 435,000 and over 15 million visitors annually. With a staff of 1,050 NRPS relies on information sharing, e-mail and collaborative tools to effectively carry out its mandate to serve and protect the community.

The organization’s previous technology environment, however, lacked the flexibility and scale to meet NRPS’s growing needs. The previous environment included siloed applications and very limited IT integration. NRPS’s IT staff of 10 were finding it cumbersome to manage IT applications within its Novell-based legacy e-mail environment, while employees – including administrators and police officers – needed enhanced communication and collaborative tools to help them be more productive and efficient. For example, the staff needed faster and more effective scheduling and messaging tools, as well as easier access to e-mail, calendar items and voice mail.

According to Akram Askoul, director of information and communications technology for NRPS, the organization decided that migrating to a Microsoft-based infrastructure would help to lower costs, centralize management and improve efficiency.

“Many of our younger workers are already familiar with using Windows-based messaging and collaboration tools, and in order to improve operations, efficiency and moral, we needed to move to a more collaborative and integrated IT environment. This would not only improve our operations, it was also essential to our staff retention, maintaining a competitive edge and allowing us to continue our constant pursuit of excellence in every circumstance,” says Askoul.

NRPS is currently using Windows-based messaging solutions including Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 and Microsoft Active Directory. However, to ensure a seamless transition from a legacy e-mail system to a Windows-based solution, the organization needed to quickly and effectively prepare and train end-users to benefit from the new environment.

Solution:

To ensure that the IT team was able to operate within the new Windows-based collaborative environment, NRPS worked with Toronto-based CMS Consulting, a Microsoft Certified Gold Partner. As an award-winning professional services company, CMS Consulting consists of highly focused and skilled senior consultants specializing in extensive customized training and knowledge transfer for organizations looking to leverage Microsoft-based IT environments.

Fast Facts Customer: Niagara Regional Police Service Website : www.nrps.com




Customer Profile : The Niagara Regional Police Service is dedicated to serving and protecting residents and visitors within the Regional Municipality of Niagara.

Business Situation : To promote better collaboration between employees, NRPS recently underwent an upgrade of its IT infrastructure. The new environment includes Microsoft-based solutions such as Exchange Server 2007, System Center Configuration Manager 2007 and Active Directory. In order to train staff quickly and effectively, NRPS worked with CMS to develop customized “hands on” training sessions around the collaboration technology.

Solution : Today, NRPS is reporting that the custom on-site IT infrastructure training provided by CMS has helped to reduce the total length of its training program by 45 per cent. As a result, NRPS was able to install and deploy the new system without relying on additional IT staff.

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

Silhouettes of several business professionals in suits walking up a ramp, set against a background of a world map.

The Novell to Microsoft migration project started in the form of a pilot in October 2008 and was completed in three months. According to Alex Chan, Vice President, CMS Consulting, the firm worked closely with the IT team at NRPS to provide on-premise training that educated employees on operating within the new technology environment. When customized training is requested by a client, CMS Consulting typically uses the same consultants and field instructors who were engaged in the original IT implementation project to deliver the training – offering a more enriched and effective training environment.

For NRPS, CMS Consulting delivered a customized “boot camp” to train staff on the new IT solution. CMS trainers are front-line experts with real-world knowledge of how organizations can best leverage Microsoft-based technology to realize a sizable return on investment.

“Our training approach involves arming technology administrators with the skill set they need to take advantage of new IT tools. Our unique “hands-on” consultant led approach to IT training helps organizations quickly gain confidence using the new system,” says Chan.

Benefits

By leveraging customized on-premise IT training from CMS Consulting, NRPS is realizing a range of business benefits.

Increased productivity

Implementing the CMS custom training model helped bring staff up to speed quickly, allowing for streamlined training costs by eliminating travel and reducing down-time. Given that NRPS is an emergency response services organization, it was important that the classroom training time was brief and very focused to allow staff to return to work quickly and carry out normal duties. CMS was able to tailor the Microsoft Server training course – typically a one week course – to four sessions that specifically focused on the areas relevant to their job.

“The CMS training was beneficial in that it allowed our staff to make full use of the new system as soon as it was installed. Having better-trained employees really helped us speed knowledge sharing and retention and obtain the most from the technology investment,” says Askoul.

“Typically, our on-premise training courses are completely modular and interchangeable based on the client needs and requirements. This flexibility helps organizations become more confident in their use of the new technology, leading to enhanced productivity,” adds Chan.

Improved return on investment

Not only was NRPS able to transition to the new system without relying on additional IT staff, the organization is reporting that the custom on-site training provided by CMS has helped to reduce the total length of the training program by 45 per cent. The flexible program enabled staff to schedule the training to fit their busy work schedules – ensuring minimal disruption to normal operations.

“The migration project was challenging because we initially had very limited knowledge using tools such as Microsoft Exchange and Active Directory. We worked closely with CMS throughout the entire project – and from a culture and personality perspective, that is really critical to success. Our IT staff are extremely satisfied with the partnership that CMS demonstrated throughout the lifecycle of the migration project,” says Askoul.

Seamless technology migration

NRPS was also particularly impressed with the level of technical expertise and instruction provided by CMS. The consultants were completely involved during the IT migration, from initial deployment to roll-out.

The Migration project will conclude at the end of May 2009 and NRPS will perform a user satisfaction survey to discover what the user community thought of the migration and new technology and what they would like to see in the future. “These types of user satisfaction surveys are integral to our planning and development processes and each year, we make a number of improvements to our services as a direct result of the input we receive in this way,” says Askoul.

“Our employees really enjoyed the training, especially the level of knowledge transfer and the fact CMS consultants are exceptionally experienced in their field. This helped to enable a smooth transition to a Microsoft-based environment without disrupting normal operations,” says Askoul.