



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE DEPENDS ON RED HAT ENTERPRISE LINUX AND ZIMBRA COLLABORATION SUITE

FAST FACTS

Companies	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Zimbra
Industry	Higher education; technology (software)
Geography	Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Sunnyvale, California
Business challenge	The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee needed to replace an aging email system with a new platform that would provide innovative collaboration solutions to their 50,000 accounts
Software	Red Hat Enterprise Linux; Zimbra Collaboration Suite
Benefits	Reduced IT administration and support costs by standardizing on Red Hat Enterprise Linux as primary campus operating system; By migrating the existing email system to Zimbra Collaboration Suite, UWM improved communication and collaboration among students, faculty and staff and provided a single integrated calendar and email solution; increased focus on student retention by providing tools to manage their academic and personal schedules and stay connected with faculty



BACKGROUND

Located in Wisconsin's largest city, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) serves as academic home to nearly 30,000 graduate and undergraduate students and an employer to more than 3,500 full-time staff and faculty. Formed in 1955 by a merger between the existing University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Wisconsin State College of Milwaukee, UWM encompasses 12 schools and colleges, and offers 156 degree programs. Just five blocks from the shores of Lake Michigan and a 10-minute drive from downtown Milwaukee, the campus spans 93 acres, with satellite facilities located throughout the Milwaukee metropolitan area.

Founded in 2003 (and purchased by Yahoo! in 2007), Sunnyvale, California-based Zimbra is the creator of leading open source email and collaboration software. Zimbra's state-of-the-art application integrates email, contacts, shared calendar, voice over IP (VoIP), and online document authoring into a single application with a rich browser-based interface. Deployed by more than 500 academic institutions around the world, Zimbra Collaboration Suite is compatible with all standard email clients, features over-the-air mobile sync to iPhone and BlackBerry, and integrates easily with third-party applications. As of March 2009, Zimbra had more than 40 million paid mailboxes.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Building community among students, faculty and staff is a key objective for most universities. And technology – in the form of email, calendaring, messaging, and collaboration solutions – has become an essential tool in achieving that objective. At the turn of the century, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) realized it was outgrowing its communications infrastructure, and in 2004, the IT team began planning for the vital task of replacing its aging and disparate email and calendar systems.

The first step: to perform a “needs analysis” based upon what the community of students, faculty members and staff desired. This was no small task: with more than 50,000 accounts, it took a full year to gather input about what would be required from an email/calendar system capable of meeting UWM's needs. And it wasn't until the end of this long process, that the UWM IT staff realized that what community members really wanted was an integrated email, calendar and messaging solution.

"From the moment calendaring entered the picture, deploying a holistic communications solution that would allow us to stay in better touch – especially with new freshman – became our key goal," said UWM chief information officer Bruce Maas. "Most students that drop out do so during

the first semester of their first year. We realized that if we could strengthen students' connection to the University community in those crucial first six to eight weeks, we could improve our student retention rates significantly."

By soliciting input from its faculty, staff and students, the University had developed a long list of requirements—more than 40—to drive the selection of the email and calendaring system.

Three of these emerged as absolutely critical elements in evaluating the new solution:

1. The University needed to employ a single email, calendaring and messaging environment to serve all members of the campus community (students, faculty and staff) replacing the previous distinct systems for different departments;
2. The environment needed to be user platform-independent and provide the same level of service regardless of desktop or laptop computer; and
3. The environment should be able to scale to 50,000 accounts.

SOLUTION

With its requirements defined, UWM embarked on a lengthy selection process that involved sending requests for proposals to virtually every vendor in the email and collaboration software business. In the end, UWM received proposals from five vendors—Microsoft, IBM, Sun, CommuniGate, and Zimbra—but the Zimbra solution quickly rose to the top of the list.

"Red Hat Enterprise Linux is one of the most requested OS today, primarily due to its stability and performance. It was the obvious choice as the primary deployment platform for Zimbra."

**—Ramesh May, Senior Manager,
Marketing and Products, Zimbra"**

The No. 1 reason: the low total cost of ownership (TCO) while meeting all requirements. Said Maas, "We focused on the TCO—that is, the lifetime cost, not just the purchase cost of the application—and Zimbra emerged as the consensus choice." Indeed Zimbra's own studies show its TCO to be 20 percent to 30 percent lower than that of Microsoft Exchange, according to Ramesh May, senior manager of marketing and products for Zimbra.

Another critical element in the decision was the fact that the University had standardized on Red Hat Enterprise Linux several years earlier. With close to 400 servers running Red Hat Enterprise Linux—which also serves as Zimbra's primary development and deployment platform—the UWM team felt confident that Zimbra Collaboration Suite would be optimized for the UWM environment. Add to that Zimbra's rich feature set, open source technology, administrator-friendly architecture, compatibility with campus systems, and ability to synchronize with other desktop clients, and the choice was clear.

In 2007, UWM inked a contract with Zimbra, and by the summer of 2008, it had migrated both its email and calendar functions to the new system.

BENEFITS

Today, UWM is employing Zimbra Collaboration Suite to support the email, calendar, messaging, and collaboration needs of the vast majority of its 50,000 accounts.

"We're looking to help students get through a life transition and stay in school when they're dealing with many more degrees of freedom than they're accustomed to," said Maas. "We view the calendar as a way to achieve this because it helps them better organize their multiple roles, whether academic, student life, or personal."

According to Maas, feedback from the campus community has been very positive. "The fact that we can automatically populate calendars with key dates such as financial aid and tuition payment deadlines, or class schedules and exam dates, and then make it easy to subscribe to these calendars, is a major service enhancement to those using the service, and this level of interaction will improve communications with our students at UWM," he said.

With a pre-negotiated long-term contract and annual maintenance fees locked in, the TCO estimates have been spot-on. As a result, "we're delivering an integrated calendaring



and email solution at a total cost of around \$10 per account annually," said Maas, "Which is cost-effective for the business and academic value, and greater efficiency we receive from a unified environment."

On top of the cost savings associated with Zimbra, UWM also benefited from significant cost savings with Red Hat Enterprise Linux. And Red Hat Enterprise Linux played a major role in the success of the project. Not only did standardizing on it allow UWM to increase IT worker productivity and reduce its support and overhead costs, but Zimbra chose it as a development platform because of its reliability, performance, and scalability.

"Because Zimbra is a highly sophisticated product, we needed a rock-solid development platform," said May. "The stability and performance of Red Hat Enterprise Linux is the best in the industry. It was the obvious choice as a development platform for Zimbra."

David Crass, UWM's chief enterprise architect, echoed May's sentiments: "We have a relatively complex environment, and we've found the tools included in Red Hat Enterprise Linux suit our environment well," he said. "What's more, due to Red Hat's enterprise class support, we know we can rely on them to provide service when needed."

As for the future, UWM has big plans for Zimbra. For starters, the school is looking to integrate its homegrown tutoring and mentoring system.

"With Zimbra, we can let faculty, staff and students incorporate their personal lives into their calendars, and subscribe to a large number of academic and organizational calendars based on their personal interests, which helps them better able to juggle all of their responsibilities and in effect further connects them to the UWM community," said Maas.

"When evaluating integrated email and calendar solutions, we focused on the total cost of ownership – that is, the lifetime cost, not just the purchase cost – of the applications. Zimbra running on Red Hat Enterprise Linux emerged as the clear consensus choice."

**–Bruce Maas, chief information officer,
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee**

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