

Cloud-based Collaboration Enables Limitless Opportunities for Educators

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore directs the formulation and implementation of education policies within Singapore. The MOE governs the development and administration of government and government-aided schools and educational institutes, including registration of private institutions. It employs over 30,000 teachers in more than 350 schools in Singapore.

ORGANISATION

Ministry of Education (Singapore)

INDUSTRY

Education and Learning

CHALLENGE

Limitation of email capacity, inability to cope with increased usage and lack of collaborative tools brought about ineffective use of public school communication systems.

SOLUTION

To future-proof scalability and to further harness the potential of evolving Web tools, the MOE migrated the public school email system to the cloud environment. This allows for integration of online collaborative tools in real-time—and to greater efficiency as well as scale to more users seamlessly.

BENEFITS OF CLOUD SERVICES

- Greater email functionalities and work tools
- Collaborative Platform
- Greater Teacher-Student Interaction
- Scalability and Flexibility

The Challenge

Innovative Web 2.0 tools have provided users with email account capacity beyond 2GB for some years now, but users of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) incumbent email system had to contend with just 100MB. It allowed only simple email communication, and did not include work tools such as a calendar function.

The previous system was not easily scalable. Hence, it was not able to cope with the increased usage and demand which resulted in numerous incidents of unplanned downtime. This frustrated users and led to dissatisfaction with the email service.

The Solution

"We launched a Web 2.0 messaging system because we believe there is an urgent need for a resilient and scalable system to be ready in case of emergency when the messaging system becomes a critical component among teachers to interact and collaborate," said Mr Lim Teck Soon, IT Director at the MOE.

Under the direction of this vision and with the objective of employing a scalable and future-proof technology for users, the MOE IT team evaluated and found cloud-based applications most suited to the task.

The team realised that the cloud platform was able to facilitate the widest range of compatible platforms and mobile devices, enabled collaboration on new projects and sharing of information quickly and easily.

Collaborating with Google and NCS Pte Ltd, the MOE set out to implement iCON, a Google Apps for Education.

The decision by the MOE to adopt the open standard cloud computing platform is recognised as a pioneering decision, MOE being the first in Asia to provide such tools to all teachers in a public school system.

“MOE is taking a leadership position within the Southeast Asian government and enterprise sector by embracing the full power of the Web. First, by significantly reducing IT infrastructure costs by deploying a proven, reliable and secure cloud computing solution for the education sector. More importantly, providing teachers with easy-to-use yet powerful online communications and collaboration tools to enhance the teaching and learning environment in schools across the nation,” said Ms Tan Bee-Loon, Head of Enterprise at Google Southeast Asia.

The Benefits

User Benefits

Key benefits of the new cloud-based system include increased email disk space (up to 7GB) and better accompanying email work tools such as calendaring and an improved address book.

Collaborative Platform

As a collaborative platform, the Google Apps for Education offers instant messaging, blog tools, wiki workspaces and a customised message board. These tools facilitate greater interaction amongst teachers as well as enable timely information to be disseminated to educators within the MOE environment.

Greater Teacher-Student Interaction

Cloud-based workspaces also allow for online interaction between teachers and students on projects or school work.

The cloud platform enables MOE to scale up on capacity quickly, collaborate on new projects, and share information quickly and easily.



(Pictured: Screen capture of iCON interactive platform)

Scalability and Massive Cost Savings

The Google Apps for Education is built on a distributed cloud computing platform, which allows for scalability and the robustness to cater for unforeseen increases in usage and future system upgrades. With a cloud-based platform, these are possible without the need to re-engineer the system infrastructure.

The cloud-based system will also allow regular upgrades to the architecture with improved or new features, at no additional cost to the MOE.

Success

The MOE started the project with the objective to migrate a targeted 34,000 users; but the project has proven to be so successful that the cloud-based infrastructure now caters for more than 40,000 email users, including users such as the schools administrative staff as well as school leaders and selected HQ users who frequently collaborate with schools.

About the National Grid

The National Grid is a national effort that draws together commercial cloud service providers to offer pay-per-use access to compute, storage and software facilities. The three consortia who have been appointed National Cloud Service Providers are Alatum led by Singapore Computer Systems Ltd (now part of SingTel), nGrid led by New Media Express Pte Ltd and PTC System (S) Pte Ltd.

For more information, email ida_grid@ida.gov.sg

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