Real Estate Firm Chooses Office 365 over Google to Improve Collaboration

Overview

**Country or Region:** Singapore  
**Industry:** Real estate services

**Customer Profile**
With more than 5,000 employees and agents, Hersing Corporation provides real estate brokerage, property management, money transfer, and brand management services for ERA, RIA, Coldwell Banker, and Western Union.

**Business Situation**
Hersing wanted to standardize its messaging environment and enhance its communication and collaboration capacity while streamlining IT processes and reducing IT costs. After it evaluated several cloud services, Hersing determined that Google Apps did not provide the familiar user experience or the deep collaboration functionality that the company needed. Instead, Hersing adopted more than 200 Microsoft Office 365 subscriptions for its headquarters employees and 5,000 additional Office 365 subscriptions for its field agents. Now, the company has standardized its messaging environment and its business identity, developed the agility it needs to expand, and reduced its IT costs by as much as US$300,000.

**Solution**
After evaluating Google Apps web services, Hersing adopted more than 200 Microsoft Office 365 subscriptions for its headquarters employees and will adopt 5,000 more Office 365 subscriptions for its field agents.

**Benefits**
- Seamless collaboration
- Standardized identity
- Flexible environment
- Reduced IT cost up to US$300,000

“Google had gaps we would have had to fill with other solutions. But when we subscribed to Office 365, we had a working enterprise solution right from the start.”

David Seah, Assistant Vice President, Information Technology, Hersing Corporation

Employees and agents at Hersing Corporation—working across a disparate mix of messaging technologies—sometimes found it difficult to communicate. Email messages and attachments could be delayed, lost, or corrupted, which reduced efficiency. Hersing wanted to standardize its messaging environment and enhance collaboration while controlling IT costs. After it evaluated several cloud services, Hersing determined that Google Apps did not provide the familiar user experience or the deep collaboration functionality that the company needed. Instead, Hersing adopted more than 200 Microsoft Office 365 subscriptions for its headquarters employees, and 5,000 additional Office 365 subscriptions for its field agents. Now, the company has standardized its messaging environment and its business identity, developed the agility it needs to expand, and reduced its IT costs by as much as US$300,000.
Situation
Based in Singapore, Hersing Corporation provides real estate, property management, money transfer, and brand management services for global brands such as ERA, RIA, Coldwell Banker, and Western Union. Hersing has more than 5,000 employees and agents throughout South East Asia.

From its offices in Singapore, Hersing helped support its messaging requirements with an internal email system, and the agency’s 200 office employees managed their email and calendars with the Microsoft Outlook messaging and collaboration client. The company’s 5,000 field agents communicated using a disparate mix of messaging technologies and solutions that ranged from web-based email programs, such as Google or Yahoo, to text messaging using mobile phones. But employees and agents all communicated using a variety of mobile devices, including the tablet PC and iPad, and iPhone, Android, Blackberry, and Windows Phone smartphones.

Working across multiple messaging domains, Hersing staff and agents sometimes found it difficult to communicate without encountering problems. Business email messages to customers and partners were sometimes delayed or filtered as spam, and attachments could be lost or corrupted. With limited email storage, employees could not send or receive large attachments, and sometimes even had to clear their inbox before asking a customer or colleague to resend an attachment. It all created delay and reduced efficiency.

“Communication is fast-paced in real estate,” says David Seah, Assistant Vice President, Information Technology at Hersing Corporation. “We need to send and receive photographs, presentations, spreadsheets, documents, and agreements that need to be signed all through email—quickly and reliably.”

Without a standardized messaging environment, it was difficult for the company to maintain a centralized list of contacts, and facilitate collaboration between employees, agents, and customers. With people trying to collaborate across multiple environments and devices, the IT team of four administrators and two developers spent too much time trying to troubleshoot and safeguard the company’s network. Hersing deployed third-party anti-phishing, antivirus, and anti-spam solutions, which helped safeguard network resources—but increased IT workload and cost.

The company wanted to enhance its communication and collaboration capacity while streamlining IT processes and refocusing the IT team on strategic goals. “We needed a standardized corporate domain,” says Seah. “But we knew that building an on-premises messaging and collaboration environment for 5,000 users scattered across locations and technologies would require a heavy investment in time, manpower, and infrastructure.”

To help avoid that heavy investment, Seah’s team began to evaluate cloud technology—remote computing resources delivered as services over the Internet. “To stay competitive, we wanted to provide our agents and staff with the most advanced technology available to communicate, collaborate, and deliver from anywhere at any time,” says Seah.

Solution
In August, 2011, Hersing spent almost four weeks evaluating Google Apps web services and Microsoft Office 365, a subscription-based offering from Microsoft.

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David Seah, Assistant Vice President, Information Technology, Hersing Corporation
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cloud services, which includes Microsoft Exchange Online, Microsoft SharePoint Online, Microsoft Lync Online, and Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2010. After using each solution to compose, send, and manage messages, documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and calendar items, Hersing determined that Office 365 would meet the company’s requirements better than Google Apps. “Office 365 appeared to be the right choice from the very beginning,” says Seah. “Cost is one factor, but we also wanted a familiar interface that our employees could adopt quickly with minimal disruption. We didn’t think Google Apps was rich enough compared to the Microsoft tools we were familiar with.”

In fact, Hersing was concerned that the messaging and productivity components of Google Apps were not integrated well enough to support a large collaboration environment. “Office 365 is more appropriate for enterprise than Google,” says Seah. “Google Apps is divided in separate modules, but Office 365 is integrated into a single suite that interoperates well with other solutions.”

Working with Axiom IT Solutions, a member of the Microsoft Partner Network and a Microsoft Cloud Accelerate Partner, Hersing began its phase 1 deployment of Office 365 in October 2011. By early December—weeks ahead of schedule and with no down time—the company had replaced its legacy email environment with more than 200 Office 365 subscriptions. After successfully adopting Office 365 within the group, Hersing will extend the Office 365 experience for its agents in a phase 2 deployment, starting with divisional directors.

“Working with Axiom IT Solutions has been a great experience,” says Seah. “With their strong support and vast experience, we enjoyed a smooth migration and implementation of Office 365.”

By choosing Office 365, Hersing could also provide its employees with instant messaging, web conferencing, and document sharing capabilities far superior than Google Apps. The IT team has used SharePoint Online to build intranets where employees and agents can collaborate on documents across departments. Employees use Lync Online to communicate with colleagues instantly and organize and attend remote conferences with customers and partners through PCs or mobile devices. “The IT team even uses Lync Online to share desktops with employees and deliver remote support,” says Seah. “That’s something we could not have accomplished with Google.”

Hersing had no experience with the reliability or support Google could offer, but with the easy-to-use Office 365 administration console and proven support from Microsoft and its partners, the company is confident it can manage more than 5,000 employees and agents in a single collaboration environment that bridges locations and device.

Benefits

When Hersing adopted Microsoft Office 365, it delivered powerful communication and collaboration capabilities to its employees and agents. The company standardized its messaging environment and its business identity; developed the agility it needs to expand; and significantly reduced its IT infrastructure, management, and maintenance costs.

Seamless Collaboration

By adopting a suite of powerful collaboration tools, Hersing has helped make it easier for its employees and agents to communicate efficiently, cooperate
productively with partners and suppliers, and serve customers more effectively. With mailbox storage of up to 25 gigabytes in Microsoft Exchange Online, Hersing employees and agents can send and receive email attachments of nearly any size. Internal email messages are not delayed or lost when they cross domains. Employees can send and receive instant messages or share documents, no matter where they are or what device they use.

“Seamless communication creates more efficiency in every aspect of our business,” says Seah. “Google Apps did not provide the familiar user experience or the deep collaboration functionality we can deliver to our employees and agents with Office 365.”

Standardized Identity, Flexible Environment
Once Hersing completes its Office 365 adoption, all 5,000 company employees and agents will communicate from a common domain, which will help Hersing serve its customers better, be more competitive, and maintain a positive business identity. Employees and agents can access all of the functionality in Office 365 through whatever device they use. Within just a few months, more than a third of Hersing employees already used Office 365 to manage email, calendars, and instant messaging on their mobile devices.

With a flexible, cloud-based collaboration infrastructure, Hersing can support its business growth without a large investment. “We are growing rapidly,” says Seah. “But without having to invest in a large internal infrastructure, we have the agility to scale up Office 365 as we add new field agents and expand into new markets.”

Reduced IT Costs up to $300,000
Hersing avoided up to US$100,000 in infrastructure costs when it migrated from an on-premises environment to Office 365. With a single collaboration environment throughout the enterprise, the IT team will spend less time on routine management and maintenance, which will help lower overall IT costs.

By delivering all the collaboration tools it needs in a single service, Hersing eliminated the need for third party solutions for data security, storage, and back up, which David Seah estimates will save the company up to US$200,000 in licensing and IT administration costs. And by choosing Office 365 over Google Apps, Hersing will not have to purchase or manage third-party instant messaging, web conferencing, and document sharing solutions. “Google had gaps we would have had to fill with other solutions,” says Seah. “But when we subscribed to Office 365, we had a working enterprise solution right from the start.”

David Seah, Assistant Vice President, Information Technology, Hersing Corporation

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Microsoft Online Services

Microsoft Online Services are business-class communication and collaboration solutions delivered as a subscription service and hosted by Microsoft. With these offerings, customers can cost-effectively access the most up-to-date technologies and immediately benefit from streamlined communications, simplified management, and business-class reliability and security features.

For more information, visit:
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For more information about Axiom IT Solutions products and services, visit the website at:
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For more information about Hersing Corporation products and services, visit the website at:
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