

Case Study

RET sees Cloud Skepticism Transformed into a Passion for Office 365

About RET

RET provides public transport services in the Rotterdam metropolitan area. The company's 2700 employees and 500 or so vehicles—including metro trains, buses and trams—see over 190 million travelers safely on their way each year.

Context

RET was using an on-premises Microsoft Exchange environment which had become so outdated that further expansion was no longer an option; the archive space, for instance, fell far short of the requirements. As a result, RET was looking for a modern collaboration and communication platform.

Solution

RET opted for the Office 365 cloud solution due to its excellent security, value for money and user-friendliness.

The benefits identified by the client include

- Good value for money
- Collaboration and knowledge-sharing
- Ample email archive space

Rotterdam RET was struggling with an outdated email platform and faced the choice between purchasing new servers and software and retaining these in-house, or switching over to a cloud environment.

After a thorough evaluation was carried out, the initial skepticism about the cloud was overcome by the advantages of Office 365. This was quickly followed by a smooth transition with the help of Avanade as the implementation partner, and the result is a modern communication and collaboration platform for all RET staff.

Case Study

Context

RET had an outdated Microsoft Exchange platform that was reaching its limitations, to the extent that essential expansion and modernization work was barely possible. Onno Donkervoort, ICT manager at RET: “RET employs around 2700 people and roughly 1100 of them have an email account. These are our non-operational employees. But other employees—including bus, metro, tram and maintenance personnel—were unable to access email and diary options. The available methods of communication with them included paper mailings. It wasn’t uncommon for passengers using Twitter to be better informed about delays than our staff.”

The old situation didn’t fit with the modern-day RET approach. Onno Donkervoort: “We want to be wholly inclusive and offer everyone in the organization access to a modern collaboration and communication platform. In addition, this would also help reduce the vast paper information stream.”

Another downside to the old email environment was its limited storage space. Onno Donkervoort: “With so many employees, the email archive put huge pressure on our SAN (Storage Area Network), which meant that we had to be quite strict on archive space for each user. This of course conflicts with what the users actually want, which is to be able to keep their email history for as long as possible.”

Solution

A cloud solution seemed to offer a potential solution to these issues. Onno Donkervoort continues: “We examined all the options out there — from cloud to on-premises solutions. A cloud solution has more options for unlimited email archiving. Access to email is also easier, both for office staff and operational staff. On the other hand, people were skeptical about security and the risks associated with a cloud environment. Historically,

RET data has always been kept secure on our servers, whereas we didn’t have sufficient experience of the cloud service.”

Microsoft was one of three parties to receive a Request For Proposal (RFP) from RET containing a number of specifications. Onno Donkervoort explains: “A key consideration is that the provider can guarantee the security of our information and deliver audit reports in this regard. Likewise, availability levels should be on a par with our on-premises situation, if not better. Lastly, RET must retain ownership of the information.”

Working with Avanade, their Microsoft Certified Partner, all of the specifications and requirements were considered from an Office 365 cloud perspective. The conclusion was that all the risks fell well within the margins specified.

Onno Donkervoort: “An important aspect of the selection process concerned the provider’s capacity to offer an implementation partner; a partner that has to the right fit for us. Avanade met this requirement in full.”

There was, however, one additional requirement; this time from the users themselves, who had provided their input into the decision...

The future users were consulted at an early stage in the selection process. Onno Donkervoort: “We had a panel evaluate the user functionality of the various proposals.

Do they cover everything that we had asked for beforehand? How would you rate the interface’s look & feel? And of course cost was another important point. The evaluation of all the proposals and the good value for money meant that Office 365 was chosen, with components including Exchange, SharePoint and Lync as well as trusted staples Word, Excel and Outlook.”

André Akkerman from partner Avanade comments: “Office 365 really stands out from the other solutions on offer.

Compared to Google, for instance, the Microsoft environment really does represent a single integrated solution. Furthermore, Microsoft boasts years of experience and a proven track record in cloud solutions.”

Implementation

Onno Donkervoort: “The cloud signifies real change for us. We are now moving away from computer-based licenses to a user-based subscription formula, and from in-house servers to an environment with no hardware. It takes a little while to get your head around it.”

Migration of the office spaces was completed in one weekend and the central traffic control was migrated separately: “Central traffic control at the regional center is responsible for the 24/7 day-to-day management of metro train, bus and tram traffic. As an extra safety measure, we chose to handle this group separately and migrated it one Wednesday evening. Everything went very quickly and according to plan”, says André Akkerman.

Onno Donkervoort attributes the smooth transition partly to the positive dynamic that exists between Microsoft and Avanade. “Avanade is a great fit for the pragmatic approach we take at RET; they have the same hands-on mentality. There’s no doubt that the short lines of communication between RET, Avanade and Microsoft were a major factor in the project’s success.”

Advantages

Since the introduction of Office 365, RET has enjoyed a modern platform for communication and collaboration. Onno Donkervoort: “Email storage in particular has improved massively. This featured at the top of the wish list for RET employees. Now everyone has access to an email archive of several Gigabytes. With Office 365, we now also have added functionality like Lync Online. Chat and video conferencing offer new ways of working and we are seeing a gradual increase in their usage.



“With Office 365, Microsoft is setting itself apart from the competition in terms of security, user-friendliness and value for money.”

– André Akkerman, Avanade

The same applies to knowledge sharing. In the cloud, our users can access documents any place and any time; even those belonging to other colleagues. This is a real bonus compared with the old situation, where a lot of information was held on PCs' hard drives, making it inaccessible to others.

Don't get me wrong — we haven't transformed ourselves overnight in terms of usage and experience, but we are making huge steps in the right direction. Not long after adopting Lync Online, we held a video conference with a potential supplier. This immediately illustrated one of the important advantages of Office 365. With the old system, we would have had to hire external video conferencing facilities. This time we were able to do it all in-house.”

Now, maintenance staff, metro, bus and tram personnel also have access to email and diary options. André Akkerman: “When we implemented Office 365, we made a distinction between two kinds of users. The office staff are knowledge workers and need to have access to all services. The operational workers who don't have their own designated PC use a scaled-down kiosk version.” RET has provided a number of its operational staff with a tablet. “These users now have their own 'work station', which has been very

positively received. A special app gives them information on delays, which allows them to update passengers accordingly.

The tablet also serves as another way of reaching this group — for work instructions or e-learning projects, for example. At present, 550 employees in the metro department have a tablet and we hope to extend this to everyone in the near future,” says Donkervoort.

The initial mild skepticism about the cloud dissipated soon after RET's choice of Office 365. Akkerman: “Microsoft has vast amounts of experience when it comes to online solutions. The company has also invested heavily over the years in the scalability and security of its cloud solutions. But even today there is a perception that you may as well leave your data lying on the street, although that is far from the truth. The truth is that Microsoft cloud solutions are extremely well protected. Perhaps organizations should instead be asking themselves whether their own on-premises system feels as secure as that of a similar organization with cloud-based IT. And whether they have the same level of stability. Office 365 boasts an excellent stability record, with Microsoft publishing quarterly 'uptime' reports on the solution's performance. Over the previous four quarters, average uptime was 99.97%.”

Microsoft Office 365

Office 365 is ideal for businesses that need access to email anywhere, well known Office programs, web conferencing and file sharing. For just a small fee per user per month, you have almost unlimited access to your email and Office files. You can also create, save and edit Office documents using online versions of popular Office software. File sharing, web conferencing, Intranet and website — everything is included.

“Email storage has improved massively. This was high on the wish list for our RET staff. We are also seeing increasing collaboration via chat and video conferencing options”

Onno Donkervoort
ICT manager at RET

“In the past, social media meant that passengers were often better informed of the status of their journey than staff. Now, all RET employees can remain completely up to date — whether on the bus, tram or metro train.”

Onno Donkervoort
ICT manager at RET



Avanade helps clients realize results in a digital world through business technology solutions, cloud and managed services that combine insight, innovation and expertise focused on Microsoft technologies. Avanade, which is majority owned by Accenture, was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation and has 23,000 professionals in more than 20 countries. Additional information can be found at www.avanade.com.

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