

## Insourcing the E-mail Service

In the fast-paced, competitive world of information technology, a company's existence is highly dependent on the speed and reliability of its communication. Along with mobile phones and the Internet, there comes an ever increasing demand to have access to the electronic e-mail service anywhere, at any time. As compared to other messaging media like SMS messages and faxes, e-mail services are quite flexible and cost-effective, while having fewer message length limitations.

Due to its advantages, all companies, from startups to large corporations, employ such services, often at a small scale. To circumvent many of the costs and complications of hosting a dedicated e-mail system within the company, they opt to outsource this service. This approach is sufficient on the short-run. However, any growing company can benefit from the dedicated services of a mail server, learning to gradually rely on the features they provide.

### ***Why Should You Host Your Own Mail Server?***

The reasons to host your own dedicated mail server are many. Control is, however, the key issue. You can have total control over the hardware and software you are using and you can decide how the pieces should work together. This ensures a more productive environment for the departments in charge of customer interaction and internal communication. A well-designed e-mail communication system can also increase the efficiency and speed of your employees, can provide up-to-date information, can be used as a live reporting system and can also help optimize resource usage.

### ***What Do You Need?***

Before deciding whether to insource your email communication or not, there are a few aspects you should consider. The next section describes what you need in order to install and configure an in-house e-mail messaging system:

### **Internet Connection**

Often overlooked, your company's Internet connection is crucial for your e-mail flow. Therefore you should keep in mind that large numbers of e-mails and spam (unsolicited messages) can bring down your connection during peak times. This can have a negative impact on your business especially if your website or e-mail can no longer be accessed due to insufficient bandwidth. Therefore, you should first estimate the daily or hourly traffic to then assess the compliance of the Internet connection with the system you will deploy.

At this stage, you will notice that a very high amount of traffic (roughly 70%) originates from spam messages. This is useless information transmitted to or from you that ultimately generates higher costs. A very important decision must be made regarding the spam issue. It is highly recommended that you use a messaging solution that includes a varied and complete anti-spam and anti-viral scheme.

### Domain Name

For most companies, the domain name is already available. The domain name is the actual identification tag of any particular company on the Internet. While web pages can exist without a domain name, customers are more likely to remember the name of a site rather than a set of numbers.

The same principle that applies to web pages also works for e-mails. If you already have a domain name, it can be used for both e-mail communication and your website. In fact, it is recommended that you should use the same domain name so that your customers don't get confused. If you need to buy a domain name, there are hundreds of web-based companies selling such services. The domain name is relatively inexpensive given the advantages it yields, thus being an important addition to the pool of resources available to your company on the net.

### Software & Hardware

The required software depends on what you decide to implement in the final system. One of the requirements is the actual mail server, but other software like antivirus, anti-spam or advanced routing systems may be on your checklist as well. When deciding which software best suits your company, the following guidelines should be taken into account:

- ✓ Consider the running costs, not only those related to the actual purchase. For example, maintaining an open source server is never a breeze.
- ✓ Choose a system that scales easily. Rigid systems hamper your company's adaptability.
- ✓ Go for a secure system. Identity theft, impersonation, phishing and hacking are very popular these days.
- ✓ Test multiple solutions before making a decision.
- ✓ Take your time and ask for as much information as possible. A reliable messaging solution developer will always provide technical support during the evaluation period.

After deciding on a certain solution, an IT specialist is needed in order to install, configure and maintain the system. The quality, security and availability of the e-mail service will be directly dependent on the system administrator's expertise and ability to cope with any issues. Overlooking this will most definitely result in poorer result.

The physical requirements of the e-mail system generally consist in one desktop PC, or one server. Off-the-shelf hardware is enough to serve small to medium size companies and may even be preferred due to its low cost. When it comes to complicated systems, increased traffic and a large number of users, high-end commercial systems will better meet your requirements.

### Collocation

This method has to be used if the Internet connection provided within the company is insufficient to run the mail server or if the network infrastructure does not allow the addition of a mail server in a secure and productive manner. In this case, the hosting company runs a physical machine with the specified configuration at their site, on their Internet connection.

The machine runs at all times and usually has backup systems to maintain functionality during downtime.

Collocating a server is much more expensive than keeping it within the company and can be hard to supervise, as it is separated from the internal network. Such a solution has its advantages, but keeping things simple is the recommended approach if collocation is not mandatory. You might be inclined to collocate the DNS (domain name), web service and e-mail system. Make your decision while bearing in mind that physical access to the system(s) will be limited. Such access is less important than the quality of the provided service, but it can generate unnecessary loss of time and money during maintenance operations.

### **Conclusions**

As speed and mobility demands increase, business communication tends to shift from traditional to electronic means. Thus, having a well-designed and optimized e-mail service may provide you with a competitive edge.

Insourcing the e-mail service usually happens once the company starts to expand, as the need for a better and more robust communication method emerges. Choosing the right tool for the right job is always the key and the e-mail service is no exception.

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