

Google delivers 'email for life' for Trinity College students



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John Murphy
IT Director



ABOUT GOOGLE APPS EDUCATION EDITION

Google Apps Education Edition is a free suite of hosted communication and collaboration applications designed for schools and universities. Google Apps includes Gmail (webmail services), Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Talk (instant messaging and voice over IP), Google Docs (online document creation & sharing) and a Start Page for creating a customisable homepage on a specific domain, as well as administrative tools, customer support and access to APIs to integrate Google Apps with existing IT systems.

For more information visit
www.google.com/a/edu

The Institution

Trinity College Dublin was founded in 1592 and is internationally recognised as Ireland's premier university. Ranked 13th in the top 50 European universities by the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) university league tables, Trinity College has over 15,000 registered students studying Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Engineering, Mathematics and Science; and Health Sciences.

Product

Google Apps for Education featuring Google Mail™, Google Calendar™, Google Docs™, Google Sites™ and Google Talk™

Approach

The students of today are the leaders of tomorrow. However, once students leave, they often lose touch with the university and contacting alumni to inform them of homecoming events and raising awareness of college developments and fundraising projects is difficult.

Students are also increasingly demanding the same access to the Internet and other applications as they use in their personal lives. They want the ability to easily exchange large files, share and store photos, chat on social networks and set up websites and blogs – and they want to use packages that are familiar to them without restrictions or limitations.

Mindful of both the needs of the students and the university, Trinity College Dublin's IT team was struggling with a legacy email system that lacked the features that students wanted, was no longer able to support storage demands, and couldn't be scaled efficiently to provide services to alumni. The IT team was also feeling the pressure to invest in additional hardware and storage capacity, and ongoing maintenance was high with a constant need to update virus and spam filters.

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Trinity College Dublin had a strategic vision to provide an 'email for life' service to all students. This would allow outgoing students to retain the same email address to use as their personal email and would also provide an efficient means for the college to keep in touch.

John Murphy, IT Director at Trinity College Dublin comments: “We had been looking to set up email for life for some time. It's important to be able to keep in contact with alumni as they progress in their careers and become successful in their own right. We also regularly get requests from past students looking to get in touch with classmates they've lost touch with over the years. By maintaining an ongoing relationship we have the potential to build a community that could help support university projects and fundraising activities.”

“Our legacy email system didn't offer this capability and clearly wasn't able to scale to the demands of our users. We knew we needed to find a better solution.”

Solution

Senior management at the university were already considering Google Apps for Education which provides free of charge email and a range of collaborative applications including Google Calendar – to coordinate meetings and school events with sharable calendars, Google Docs – to create, share and collaborate on documents in real-time, and Google Sites – to easily build team websites.

Murphy and his team were also interested in Google Apps because of its software-as-a-service model as it would allow the IT department to completely outsource its student email system, eliminating the need for additional hardware and ongoing maintenance, which would deliver significant cost savings.

“Google Apps provided the range of features and flexibility we were looking for – including the ability to retain the college’s email alias – and the service was completely free,” said Murphy. “The choice was not difficult and we transitioned to Google Apps over a four month period in early 2007.”

Benefits

Google Apps has delivered on Trinity College’s ambition to offer email for life to its students. The solution has also easily met the demand for increased storage space to handle large files and has provided additional applications as well.

When Trinity College Dublin transitioned from the legacy system to Google Apps, outgoing fourth year students were offered the new service as an opt-in option. The ability to keep the same email address proved popular and Trinity College Dublin was able to retain 70% of outgoing students to the new service.

“Our original goal was email for life and we have achieved that and more. For a start we no longer have to worry about maintenance – which was increasingly becoming a drain on our IT departmental resources. The ability to completely outsource email, including technical support, has also released the team to work on more strategic IT projects and freed up budget that would have otherwise gone into the ongoing support of the email system.

According to Murphy: “The new system has been embraced by our students and we’ve achieved cost savings associated with labour and operational efficiencies – and we expect the collaborative aspects of Google Apps to be a major productivity benefit going forward.”

“The move to Google Apps has been a win-win for the students, the university and the IT department. I would certainly recommend that other educational institutions struggling with outdated email systems seriously take a look at how they too can benefit from Google Apps.”

Trinity College Dublin is also working with Google to improve the Google Apps experience for students with disabilities.

While Trinity students are primarily using the Google Mail, the college is keen to highlight the benefits of the complete package: “Since we deployed Google we have focused on pushing the benefits of the email application to ensure we get close to 100% adoption and ongoing usage of the system. With this objective now close to being realised we’ll be turning our attention to educating the students on the benefits of the range of applications they have at their fingertips. The collaborative nature of Google Apps for Education is a perfect fit for our institution allowing students to come together remotely to work on joint projects, and we’ll launch a range of initiatives to deliver this message. Once we do so, I have little doubt that the adoption of all the applications by the student body will mirror the enthusiastic take-up of Google Mail,” concludes Murphy.

