

VMOGUK builds a stable platform for enterprise email with IBM CommonStore

Overview

■ The Challenge

Vallourec Mannesmann Oil & Gas UK Ltd (VMOGUK) had migrated its corporate email platform to Microsoft Exchange, and wanted to improve stability by reducing the size of user mailboxes – but deleting emails would risk the loss of important commercial and technical information

■ The Solution

VMOGUK worked with Sysnet (www.sysnet.co.uk), an IBM Business Partner, to deploy IBM CommonStore for Exchange Server on IBM BladeCenter hardware. The solution provides automated, policy-based email and attachment archiving.

■ The Benefits

User mailboxes have been reduced in size by up to 87 percent, resolving stability issues and cutting storage costs. The BladeCenter hardware provides excellent performance in a compact, energy-efficient footprint. The IBM solution is designed to be highly reliable, requiring minimal maintenance and support.



Vallourec Mannesmann Oil & Gas UK Ltd. (VMOGUK) is part of the Vallourec Group, a global organisation specialising in the manufacture of seamless steel tubes for use in the industrial and energy sectors. VMOGUK is headquartered and has its main plant in Scotland, with operations in Norway and the Netherlands, employing a total of 300 people.

VMOGUK recognises that its corporate email system is more than just a communications and collaboration platform - it also stores valuable commercial and technical information, and provides a historical record of project-related activity. To work productively, employees need

immediate access to their complete email history – and as a result, user mailboxes often contain many thousands of emails.

“As part of a group-wide corporate IT standardisation programme, we recently changed our email platform to Microsoft Exchange,” comments Scott Findlay, IT Manager at VMOGUK. “Our previous solution had been tolerant of very large mailboxes, but Microsoft recommends a 500MB limit for mail files. Some of our users had as much as 10GB of email – which led to some serious stability issues.”

The company knew it needed to reduce the size of its users’ mailboxes, and discussed several different approaches to solving this problem. Simply deleting old messages or moving them to offline tape storage was not a viable option, because users need regular access to their email history. As a result, the company



decided to look for an archiving solution that would provide rapid access to all emails and attachments while relieving the pressure on the Exchange server itself.

Finding a partner

The IT team asked long-term partner Sysnet to recommend a solution. Sysnet is an IBM Business Partner, and one of Scotland's acknowledged leaders in information management solutions.

"Sysnet has an excellent high-level understanding of our company, and has demonstrated an outstanding ability to translate our business requirements into technical solutions," comments Scott Findlay. "Sysnet convinced us that IBM CommonStore for Exchange Server was the right solution, and helped us implement it on IBM BladeCenter hardware."

Intelligent archiving

The CommonStore solution uses a set of customised policies to move large emails and attachments out of users' Exchange mail files and into a separate database for archiving. Whenever an item is archived, CommonStore replaces it with a link that leads directly to the item in the database, so users can access archived content at the touch of a button.

"IBM CommonStore takes an intelligent approach to archiving," adds Scott Findlay. "If twenty users receive copies of the same attachment, CommonStore only stores it once – which reduces overall storage needs considerably."

Stability and storage space

The implementation of CommonStore has been a notable success for VMOGUK. The new archiving policies have reduced the size of some user

"Commonstore requires almost no maintenance or support – it just sits there and it works."

*Scott Findlay, IT Manager
Vallourec Mannesmann Oil & Gas UK Ltd*

mail files by as much as 87 percent, and Exchange stability issues have been all but eliminated.

"Our users no longer have to wait for corrupt mail files to be rebuilt, which used to be a hindrance to productivity and a major strain on the mail server," says Scott Findlay. "CommonStore has stabilised our email environment, which is the main benefit – and we are also saving a lot of storage space, which ultimately contributes to reducing the total cost of operations."

Reliable infrastructure

Running the CommonStore software on the IBM BladeCenter platform provides a highly robust infrastructure that combines excellent performance with a compact, energy-efficient form-factor.

"This IBM solution provides a simple answer to a real business issues, and is extremely reliable," comments Scott Findlay. "Commonstore requires almost no maintenance or support – it just sits there and it works."

VMOGUK is now considering working with Sysnet on a similar project to archive some of the company's Microsoft SharePoint data, using IBM Content Collector and IBM Content Manager.

"Sysnet has proven the quality of IBM information management software, and we are keen to leverage these tools and gain further business benefits in the future," concludes Scott Findlay.



IBM United Kingdom Limited

PO Box 41
North Harbour
Portsmouth
Hampshire
PO6 3AU

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Customer: Vallourec Mannesmann Oil and Gas UK

Web Site: www.vmog.co.uk

Number of Employees: 305

Country or Region: United Kingdom

Industry: Oil and gas

Partner: Sysnet

Customer Profile

Established in 1994, Vallourec Mannesmann Oil and Gas UK supplies pipes and other industrial equipment to oil companies operating in the North Sea. It has 305 employees across three sites in Scotland.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office Outlook 2007
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft Exchange Server 2007

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Oil Company Halves Paper Consumption with Document and E-Mail Management System

“The Microsoft technology has helped us reduce the amount of paper we use by more than 50 per cent.”

Scott Findlay, IT Manager, Vallourec Mannesmann Oil and Gas UK

Vallourec Mannesmann Oil and Gas UK supplies pipes and equipment to companies working in the North Sea. In the past, almost all the company’s communications—and its extensive archives—were paper-based. But a commitment to environmental sustainability led the company to work with Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Sysnet to develop a fully integrated document and e-mail management system, and cut its paper consumption by more than 50 per cent.

Business Needs

Vallourec Mannesmann Oil and Gas UK supplies oilfield country tubular goods to energy companies operating in the North Sea. It deals with hundreds of documents every day, including order forms, invoices, certificates, and drilling sequences. In the past, personnel sometimes found it difficult to keep track of crucial information because of a lack of systems integration. Sales managers had to work hard to stay up-to-date with the latest client information, because the company’s complex lines of business often involve many manufacturers, suppliers, and customers.

Scott Findlay, IT Manager, Vallourec Mannesmann Oil and Gas UK, says: “Our sales people had to create and maintain a tracking spreadsheet for each customer to keep relevant documentation together. They also had to monitor incoming e-mail traffic for information relating to their clients. It took a lot of time, so we wanted to create a system that would store new information in the correct place and notify the right people automatically.”

The company’s administrative processes were mostly paper-based. Even when orders came in electronically, staff printed the documents, copied them, and sent them on

to the appropriate people. Says Findlay: "We were posting information between our three sites around Aberdeen and Glasgow, so people often had to wait for crucial documents to arrive. Most importantly, though, we were using too much paper. We wanted to cut our usage to reduce our impact on the environment."

Document storage was another challenge. The company has to keep extensive records of the pipes and joints it manufactures, to make sure that it is prepared in the event of a critical supply line failure. But because all the documentation was in hard copy, this meant that large archives and filing systems built up over time, and information became harder to retrieve quickly.

Solution

In early 2007, the company began looking at ways of consolidating its communications. "We decided to create an electronic document and e-mail management system, but we didn't have the skills to develop it in-house, so we started looking for a partner that could help," says Findlay.

After researching the options, Findlay's team decided to work with Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Sysnet. "We talked to the people at Sysnet about the problems we were having, and we were impressed by their understanding and expertise," says Findlay.

The team at Sysnet developed a solution based on a range of Microsoft technologies. At the heart of the system is Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007, which is used to create custom Web Parts and draw information together from other elements of the system, such as Microsoft Office Outlook® 2007 messaging and collaboration client, and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007.

Deployed in the company's sales department, the system helps account managers keep track of information more effectively. Susan Young, Contracts Manager, Vallourec Mannesmann Oil and Gas UK, says: "With SharePoint sites, each person on the team accesses the services they need with a single sign-on. When they log on, they see three default views with the latest information about the current orders, purchase orders, and works orders with which they're dealing. And they use the Enterprise Search feature to quickly find any information they need."

When the company receives an e-mail message with order information, such as a dispatch note from a manufacturer, the system identifies the order number and automatically sends the message to the right folder, as well as notifying the relevant account manager.

The solution integrates with the company's existing enterprise resource planning system, so crucial business documents are automatically sent to the correct folders on the company's servers. Employees now scan all the paper documents the company receives to create archived electronic copies, and the system sends these to the correct locations too.

Benefits

The company saw immediate benefits after deploying the Microsoft solution. Account managers now have an intuitive interface with all the information they need readily available. They save time, because they are notified as soon as the company receives e-mail messages relevant to their clients, and they use the Enterprise Search feature in Office SharePoint 2007 to find information fast. Most importantly, the company has radically cut its paper usage, significantly

reducing its impact on the environment. Findlay says: "The Microsoft technology has helped us reduce the amount of paper we use by more than 50 per cent." Personnel no longer need to print out and copy e-mail messages, because the system automatically sends them to the right people. And documents received in hard copy are quickly scanned and added to a comprehensive and easily navigable electronic archive.

- The company has reduced the amount of paper used in its sales department from 45 reams in the first quarter of 2007 to 20 reams in the first quarter of 2008, a saving of more than 50 per cent.
- Contract managers work more efficiently because they have a personalised view with all the latest information about their clients.
- Employees find information faster using Enterprise Search.
- Staff send documents between the company's three sites electronically, eliminating postage costs.
- Employees retrieve older documents more easily because they are electronically archived and searchable.
- Findlay and his team plan to roll out the scalable system to two other departments, making further savings.