Enterprise Class Email

Few people in the business community need to be sold on the value of email. Everybody's got an email solution, and for many of you it is the primary method of communication with your vendors, prospects and customers. Yet from our experience many solutions in use today are subpar and don't reflect the needs of dynamic organizations that employ them.

Why It's On Our Radar

Email is often taken for granted. If you are like most of our customers, you probably selected your first email service years ago when you started the business and didn't touch it since. Email comes in, email goes out, why mess with it? Many reasons, as it turns out. Chief among them is the ability of a good email and collaboration solution to transform the way you manage business information, work together and communicate with your customers. From sharing your contacts and calendars to unlimited inbox sizes to easy scheduling of meetings and resources, enterprise class email solutions deliver high return on investment through increased productivity and better management of critical data. We aren't suggesting that every company of every size should get one, but everybody would do well to perform a cost benefit analysis on this.

Solution Types

There are several good enterprise email products on the market today, including PostPath, Lotus Notes, Microsoft Exchange and Novell GroupWise. We won't go into comparisons of these offerings, but will review instead two ways of buying and deploying an enterprise email and collaboration service:

On-premise server-based solution: in this scenario, your email system is deployed in your office on a dedicated or shared server machine. The advantage of this setup is that once you buy, deploy and configure the service, it's yours to use and manage as you please. You can set up virtually unlimited inbox sizes, quickly modify system settings and set your own rules for when email data gets backed up. If you cringed reading this, then you know the disadvantage: you have to manage the system yourself. You are also responsible for building proper redundancy into the system so that you aren't left without email service (with all inbound emails bouncing back to customers) if your server crashes.

A hosted email product provides the same level of functionality as a premise-based solution, but all of your emails and the application itself are hosted in a secure datacenter by an email service provider (ESP). The service is completely transparent, and you get to use your regular email/collaboration tools like Microsoft Outlook that connect to the ESP via the Internet. The main draw of hosted email solutions is that everything is taken care of for you: from patches and upgrades to virus scanning to storing your emails in case you lose Internet connection. The drawback is that these services come at a monthly cost that is often based on how much data you store at the service provider's datacenter.

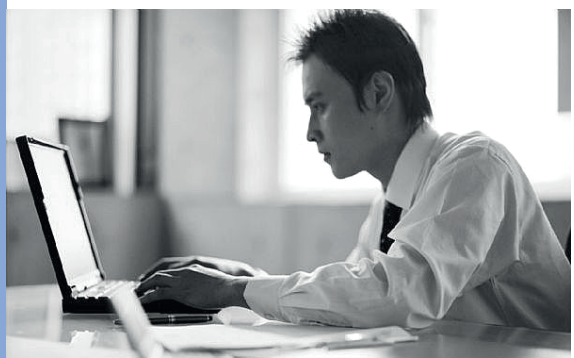
Vendors to Watch

On-premise solutions:

- PostPath, Lotus Notes, Microsoft Exchange, Novell GroupWise

Hosted email:

- Microsoft, Intermedia, Riverwatch



ENTERPRISE EMAIL ADVANTAGE

Shared contacts

Shared calendars

Shared folders

Unified messaging

Seamless mobile access

Full-featured web access