

Ditching Windows and desktop for Google and mobility: The Woolworths story

In April 2013, Woolworths migrated to *Google Apps* and *Chrome*. The migration was part of a larger transformation program at Woolworths Limited.

The move was part of a strategy to use technology to promote greater collaboration, productivity and effectiveness. Rolling out Gmail, Google Calendar and Google Talk to 26,000 staff.

The aim - to ensure staff could experience the productive and collaborative benefits of being able to work from any device, anywhere.

Last year, we caught up with **Deon Ludick, Program Director at Woolworths Limited**, to gain insight on how this is working operationally and get an update on results to date. He explained:



“We started moving the collaboration suite through Google Apps and vigorously adopted it as the solution; the docs, the mail, the calendar, the share drive, the Google drive, the social media. The second part was moving desktop into the Citrix environment. It allows us to be device-agnostic and choose whatever hardware we want to give our staff. We gave people Chrome OS because of its simplicity to manage. It’s a secured device, so it doesn’t have the same threats that you have with the classic Microsoft operating system right now.”

“Our vision is to have an environment that keeps itself up to date; that’s the big advantage we’re getting through this whole program.”

Increasing productivity through software

Woolworths adopted the software as a service stack in the cloud, specifically around Google’s full collaboration suite. It’s their cloud – they just leverage the applications. Key areas driving productivity include:

- **Co-authoring documents** – A key area where the team has seen success; also the most popular with employees.
- **Video conferencing**- Features like Hangouts have eliminated the need for many face to face meetings, saving time commuting around busy cities and easing the ability to interact.

- **Forms** – Woolworths never had a particularly great form solution, the Google Forms app both produces a slick looking form, and grafts all the responses in one place, which has saved the team time.
- **Mobility** – One of the key metrics of the program is around flexibility. As the platform is up in the cloud, it can be on anybody’s device. You can start a mail on your PC then continue with your phone, or at home; whichever suits on any device. The software service is up in the cloud in the data centre and you get the continuity regardless of the device.
- **Social** – There are 25,000 email accounts on the Google platform. Additionally, we’ve given our 175,000 store and distribution centre workers a Google Plus login because these workers don’t have email. As an organisation we all collaborate now on Google Plus. There are also Google sites and Google Drive for filling out forms and accessing the network.

Driving mobility

The software is the service in the cloud, which in turn unlocks mobility. Deon highlighted the potential this brings for the retail giant:

“Our position is unique because we’re not locked onto a device. It makes you completely device-agnostic and Google does a fantastic job to have a tablet or mobile version, or a browser version.

“We’ve chosen to move off our legacy desktop environment too; the current focus is moving away from a PC environment and towards a Chrome OS environment.

“To achieve that, our legacy Windows environment has moved onto a Citrix solution. It’s a HTML5 Citrix solution, which is unique to Woolworths. We don’t care what device you use – if you’ve got a Chrome browser and an internet connection, you can work on that device.

“The classic workstation in enterprise is now completely mobile. My favourite example of this is when I had to approve leave while flying to New Zealand and the plane had Wi-Fi. I logged in to our Citrix environment mid-flight, accessed the right system through our intranet and confirmed the approval. That’s the kind of mobility we have now.”

Engagement

The target at Woolworths is to be in a transformation program instead of just an enablement. Engagement metrics have allowed the team to track progress at different stages of the rollout program.

“Our first measure and benefit is engagement. We ask our users, especially during the software Google adoption, point blank: ‘Are you feeling proud of the organisation using this latest technology?’ The same people were asked that question three times: two weeks after migration, then four months, and then eight months into the journey,” Deon explained.

“Each time the answer would increase – there’s been an increase of ten per cent already of employees agreeing they are enjoying their job more. Our results in collaboration are also up 20 per cent and efficiency ratings are up almost 30 per cent.

We’re also measuring flexibility; the amount of people logging on from home is up 30 per cent.”

Rolling out the hardware

For the next phase, Woolworths will begin rolling out 8,000 Google Chrome OS devices to replace Microsoft Windows desktop computers – believed to be the largest such deployment in the world.

“The aim for the next six months is to complete the rollout. The thing with desktop applications is the fragmentation and the granularity; everybody’s got a little nuance, uses something slightly differently. It’s a very detailed job as we won’t be rolling out generic devices to everybody. The technology is ready, but the next big step is adoption. We pride ourselves on change management, so the next six months will only be a success when people adopt the technology and are more productive.”

The program will continue to run the same surveys as with the Google rollout; this time for the device rollout stage of the program to make sure people have accepted the change with the same pride and extra productivity as when they moved to the Google platform.

Change management will continue to play a big role, by using a staged approach, and there’s confidence in this new phase:

“The software as a service key was actually not complicated. Going into the cloud, the Google platform was quite straightforward as they already had half a billion people using the solution. That allowed us to dedicate a lot of time to change management, using a lot of our resources – we feel we’ve done a pretty good job. Those learnings will now be used when rolling out the more technical solution – devices. Change management is the magic here, not the technology. “

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