

The Sydney Diocese of The Anglican Church of Australia spreads the word with the help of IBM® Lotus collaboration tools

Overview

■ Problem

The Sydney Diocesan Secretariat (SDS), was looking for a communications solution to help it send and receive vast amounts of information across a large and geographically distributed organisation.

■ Solution

IBM Premier Business Partner ISW recommended IBM's collaboration tools including Lotus Notes and Domino version 8, Lotus Sametime and Lotus Quickr to build a Unified Communications Strategy embracing Web 2.0 tools and increased collaborative capabilities throughout the organisation.

■ Benefits

SDS now boasts a state of the art web-based communications infrastructure capable of supporting applications such as, Diocesan Business Management Dashboards, web based accounting, Parish & Clergy Management Systems, online sermons, web casting, social networks and mobile messaging. Consequently, communications and information sharing both internally and externally have been radically improved.



About the Diocese of Sydney, Anglican Church of Australia

The Sydney Diocesan Secretariat (SDS), part of the Anglican Church of Australia is the central administrative organisation of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Sydney, supporting a extensive number of independent Anglican organisations including parish churches, Independent and local schools, Anglican Retirement Villages and Anglican Youthworks just to name a few. With over 1,000,000 parishioners and 4,000 employees in the Sydney Diocese alone, not to mention its thousands of customers,

SDS is the body corporate of the Anglican Church in Australia. Its main function is to provide administrative, secretarial and accounting services to the Diocese's governing body "the Synod", as well as supporting many of the Anglican Church's diocesan entities including over 280 Parishes, 53 schools, two universities, 13 retirement villages and 12 hospices.

More importantly in providing these services SDS is dedicated to protecting the Diocesan Endowment (Financial, Property and Investments) while serving the front-line parish community in spreading the Gospel.



Bringing Everyone Together

From the outset, George Lymbers, CIO for SDS and IBM business partner ISW identified one main objective; improving communication across the Diocese in order to empower its users to spread the Christian faith and run its business operations more cost effectively and efficiently.

Secondary to this were a number of other objectives such as a desire to obtain cost savings, enhance productivity and achieve a growing need for organisational compliance within the Diocese. There was also a recognition that the latest web 2.0 collaboration technologies such as instant messaging and social networking, as well as the ability to effectively reach mobile users, were 'must-have' tools in order to attract and retain generation X and Y within the Anglican Church; as students, employees and followers.

"Many of the people we reach out to in our community, such as the young people who participate in our youth programmes, use a mobile phone as the primary way to communicate. If we want to attract and retain these young people in the Anglican Church we need to communicate with them in the ways they understand and respond to," said George Lymbers, CIO of SDS.

From an operational perspective, managing communications and information systems across multiple geographically disparate organisations, incorporating operations from schools to respite homes to youth services, was proving challenging. Over the years information silos had developed and each organisation had adopted its own technology tools, resulting in a mix of technologies from a variety of different vendors. Not only was

this not cost effective it was also exceedingly difficult for Lymbers and his team to manage the organisation's IT infrastructure. Lymbers commented, "The Diocese lacked an integrated information strategy, which meant we had no standardised approach to things like web portals or collaboration tools. On further examination we could see that information sharing was being hindered and that other information and business processes were being duplicated. We urgently needed to take action."

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A Unified Communications Strategy

SDS engaged IBM Premier Partner ISW to help perform a communications review, and to help develop a strategic plan to address some of the challenges it was facing.

With extensive use of Lotus Notes 8 already embedded throughout the organisation, SDS and ISW decided to standardise on an IBM collaboration platform utilising IBM middleware and Lotus technologies, integrated with Cisco's collaboration platform. These technologies would enable the Diocese to embark upon an ambitious unified communications journey - IBM Lotus collaboration tools including Lotus Notes 8.0 and Domino email, Lotus Sametime instant messaging and web conferencing, and Lotus Quickr to provide team collaboration rooms and online file sharing. Business Partner ISW enhanced these tools by implementing its customised Workflow-Xpress application to enable SDS to adopt defined best practise business processes.

Explaining the reasons SDS selected IBM Lotus and ISW technologies Lymbers said, "Standardising on the Lotus platform with additional applications from ISW would allow us to implement best practise business process enabled applications and help us to achieve efficiencies as well as mitigate risk across the Diocese where SDS operates in."

As an IBM authorised education centre, ISW was asked to train users across the Diocese on the new Lotus tools. Lymbers viewed this significant undertaking and investment as key to the implementation's success; he recalls, "ISW trained everyone from the Archbishop down and the high quality of this training meant there was almost universal acceptance of the new systems and processes, and people really understand how to use the technology to its full potential."

Tim Royle, Director & Principal Consultant at ISW said, "The Lotus Software collaboration tools from IBM have provided a strong framework upon which we are delivering unified communications to SDS. The real gains are being seen where we have provided business process enabled applications using IBM Lotus Notes & Domino this allows users to instantly collaborate in the context of any given point in the business process."

Spreading The Word

Collaboration and information sharing has improved dramatically throughout the Diocese and the organisation is expecting significant cost savings. "We are aiming for a 20% resource saving, and we will look to put these savings into other areas such as the services we offer the Diocesan community," said Lymbers. The organisation also takes a strong thought leadership position on green ICT and adopting a unified communications strategy ties into the Australian Anglican Church's call to reduce energy consumption across the organisation by eliminating unnecessary travel, and hence cut carbon emissions.

For SDS this is only the start of the unified communications journey, and the team is currently profiling Lotus Connections in order to extend its collaboration strategy even further with social networking capabilities. "In consultation with ISW we have designed a clear vision of where we want to take our collaboration strategy and we believe this technology will help us be more successful in bringing the community into our Church," concluded Lymbers.

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For more information

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