



Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Financial Services

Customer Profile

Sandler O'Neill & Partners is a full-service investment banking firm dedicated to providing comprehensive, innovative advisory and transaction execution services to the financial industry.

Business Situation

Sandler O'Neill sought to migrate its collaborative platform, based on Lotus Notes, to Microsoft's collaborative platform using Exchange 2003 and Outlook 2003. Sandler O'Neill's Lotus Notes licensing was set to expire, while its user community requested a move to an Outlook-based client, wanting to leverage several security and mobility features of an Exchange 2003 interface.

Solution

The Henson Group received the assignment from Microsoft to migrate all of Sandler O'Neill's Lotus Notes mailboxes and supporting infrastructure to an Exchange 2003 infrastructure to meet collaborative business, migration, and end-user requirements.

Results & Benefits

The Henson Group achieved Sandler O'Neill's objectives to migrate to the latest version of Exchange Server, but based on a Server Cluster architecture, providing failover support for applications and services that required high availability, scalability and reliability.

INVESTMENT ADVISER SEEKS TO MIGRATE TO EXCHANGE 2003 FROM LOTUS NOTES FOR FLEXIBILITY, RELIABILITY, AND SECURITY

SANDLER O'NEILL & PARTNERS, L.P.

Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 Migration

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Kevin Wall, Principal Consultant, The Henson Group

Award-winning Microsoft Gold Certified Partner
The Henson Group, Inc. (THG) provided client Sandler O'Neill & Partners, L.P. (Sandler) with expert assistance to perform a Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 migration that improve availability and scalability of the client's messaging environment.

BUSINESS SITUATION

Founded in 1988, Sandler O'Neill & Partners is a full-service investment banking firm dedicated to providing comprehensive, innovative advisory and transaction execution services to the financial industry. The firm specializes in strategic business planning, mergers and acquisitions, capital markets, mutual-to-stock conversions, investment portfolio and interest rate risk management, fixed income securities transactions and mortgage finance restructurings.

Sandler O'Neill also is a market maker in hundreds of financial stocks and publishes equity and fixed income research focused on selected banks, thrifts and insurance companies, credit card companies, investment banks, asset managers, specialty finance companies, e-finance companies and transaction execution companies.

Considering the scope of Sandler O'Neill's operations and the complexity of its business, messaging is obviously a critical function of its technology infrastructure. Issues with availability and scalability have direct ramifications on the company's performance.



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As such, Sandler O'Neill relatively recently approached Microsoft, exploring the benefits of investing in a Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 migration. Exchange Server 2003 is the latest version of Microsoft's industry-leading communications server. Exchange Server 2003 provides many features and enhancements to improve reliability, manageability, and security.

Exchange Server 2003 helps IT departments to deliver the service levels and capabilities demanded by end users, while helping organizations to reduce their TCO (Total Cost of Ownership) through areas such as server and site consolidation. Exchange Server 2003 delivers breakthrough advances for both IT professionals and business users.

Information workers get their work done more quickly because Exchange 2003 and Outlook 2003 work together to deliver consistently efficient access to personal business information independent of network characteristics. Mobile users find it easier than ever to stay up-to-date with the information flowing into their office mailboxes, no matter what device they choose to use.

Meanwhile, IT managers appreciate advances in administration, security, scalability, reliability, and built-in support for mobile computing that both lower the costs of managing an Exchange-based communications infrastructure and make it easier to deliver mission-critical messaging services.

Basically, Sandler O'Neill sought to migrate its collaborative platform, based on Lotus Notes, to Microsoft's collaborative platform using Exchange 2003 and Outlook 2003. Sandler O'Neill's Lotus Notes licensing was set to expire, while its user community requested a move to an Outlook-based client, wanting to leverage several security and mobility features of an Exchange 2003 interface.

"During the initial pilot phase of the migration many of our users were requesting to have their mailbox moved to the new Exchange environment," says Fred Bruno, Messaging Lead, Sandler O'Neill. "Many of them came from an environment where Microsoft Exchange and Outlook were the messaging solution, and after arriving here they have often found Lotus Notes lacking in features or cumbersome to use."

At the same time, disaster recovery was an important consideration for Sandler O'Neill. Tragically, the company lost more than a third of its employees -- including co-founder Herman Sandler -- in the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, but has persevered. Sandler O'Neill opened its new headquarters in January 2002.

As a top "Go-To" Gold Certified Partner for Exchange Migrations, The Henson Group received the assignment from Microsoft to migrate all of Sandler O'Neill's Lotus Notes



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The Henson Group offers a full-service Messaging unit staffed by experienced Microsoft Certified consultants, usually specializing in multiple technologies.

The Henson Group is consistently ranked at or near the top of Microsoft's official Resource Directory for Microsoft Certified Partners for Exchange server messaging infrastructure projects (<http://directory.microsoft.com>).

This group is led by Mike Stacy and Kevin Wall, both former high-level Exchange experts at Microsoft that resigned their positions to join the company in late 2005. Stacy's and Wall's field experience includes very challenging projects for major Fortune 100 U.S. companies, global conglomerates, U.S. federal departments and agencies, and industry leaders across many verticals.

Inside Microsoft, Stacy and Wall demonstrated their leadership on many occasions. For instance, they conceived and developed the popular “Exchange Health Check” for Microsoft customers. (Since arriving at THG, they have enhanced that program, which is now offered to clients.)

The Henson Group also achieved Microsoft's Advanced Infrastructure Solutions Competency by demonstrating our expert-level Exchange-related abilities, maintaining a roster of Microsoft Certified Consultants with applicable experience, and producing numerous client references to objectively testify to our abilities.

What this meant for Sandler O'Neill was that The Henson Group had the resources, project experience, and proven technical ability to achieve its objectives.

“The Henson Group was able to directly leverage existing contacts within Microsoft's Exchange Product Group in order to make this implementation a success,” says Kevin Wall, the THG Principal Consultant that performed the migration. “That kind of a relationship is not often found in even the most large-scale enterprise Exchange migrations.”

SOLUTION

As part of the process of project delivery, The Henson Group implemented a methodology that identified key objectives early in the deployment process. Additionally, key decision-making milestones were scheduled at critical stages throughout the project cycle, ensuring that Sandler O'Neill executives had opportunities to weigh and approve important decisions.

The Henson Group defined a Project Scope to set appropriate expectations. The following types of activities were scheduled



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to be completed together with the client: Discovery, Design, Installation, Configuration, Testing, Mailbox Data Migration, and Knowledge Transfer.

To ensure the success of this engagement, Sandler O’Neill was requested to provide documentation and diagrams of the existing architecture, provide documentation for existing infrastructure, procure Required Hardware in a timely fashion, and assign appropriate technical resources to the project.

Phase 1 of this project, Discovery, included an examination of the network topology, Active Directory/domain topology, message routing (internal and external), third-party application integration, and the existing Notes configuration.

Next, the design phase involved The Henson Group governed the necessary hardware configuration, the Active Directory topology design, storage layout and configuration, front-end/back-end placement, firewall/DMZ requirements, and messaging routing.

Phase 3, Installation and Configuration, included the Global Catalog/Domain Controller upgrade/installation/configuration, ADC installation and configuration, server/OS installation, SAN/LUN allocation, the Exchange Server installation, and configuration to match operating requirements.

Subsequent testing focused on AD replication, server/disk load, messaging routing, migration process and throughput, seamless Outlook connectivity, and external/internal access (OWA, RPC/HTTP, etc.).

The mailbox data migration involved the actual migration of user and public folder data from Exchange 5.5 to 2003, while data throughput was measured during testing.

RESULTS & BENEFITS

“This implementation was not only a huge success for the organization, but also very exciting in terms of an overall Messaging and Collaboration solution,” says THG’s Wall. “We leveraged the latest Exchange cluster and mobility technologies from Microsoft, and integrated them with leading industry solutions from Network Appliance, CommVault, Liquid Machines, and IronPort email security appliances.

“In addition, the most up-to-date migration strategies and tools were used to move from a Lotus Notes platform to Microsoft Exchange Server 2003,” Wall adds. “This entire project was a testament to how straightforward it can be to move to an Exchange platform, as long as the right planning and effort is put forth.”

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The Henson Group achieved Sandler O'Neill's objectives to migrate to the latest version of Exchange Server, but based on a Server Cluster architecture.

Server Clustering provides failover support for applications and services that require high availability, scalability and reliability, such as Exchange. With clustering, organizations can make applications and data available on multiple servers linked together in a cluster configuration.

Deploying a cluster eliminates a single point of failure, so when an Exchange Server is not available, then another server is firstly aware, and secondly has the capability of taking over the down server's role and the email flow continues unabated.

Clustering Exchange Server 2003 systems offered Sandler O'Neill the potential to provide the high availability that's so important for its business-critical email application.

However, clusters are much more complex than single-server Exchange deployments.

For instance, it requires understanding of the requirements of clustering-hardware configurations, such as shared storage must be accessible to all nodes, so you must correctly configure any hardware that manages storage connections (e.g., array controllers, Storage Area Network—SAN—switches) to avoid contention or corruption of databases.

Meanwhile, acute attention to detail is necessary to ensure that you correctly install Windows before installing Exchange and that you install and configure Exchange in the correct sequence to work on a cluster—a process that differs significantly from installing Exchange on one server.

The Henson Group also established a “Standby” Exchange cluster in Sandler O'Neill's New Jersey facilities. A Standby Exchange cluster is a Windows Server cluster that:

- Matches the production Exchange cluster in terms of hardware and software configuration, including Windows and Exchange versions and software updates.
- Has Exchange program files installed on it, but is not yet configured with any Exchange Virtual Servers.
- Can be used only when all Exchange Virtual Servers on the production cluster are offline.

A standby cluster can be used to recover from the loss of an entire Exchange cluster, or as a site resilience solution for Exchange clusters.

The Henson Group also collaborated with Network Appliance to implement and configure a storage solution from NetApp that delivered a powerful, data center product designed to



About The Henson Group

Founded by former Microsoft engineers in 2000, The Henson Group is an award-winning Microsoft Gold Certified Partner specializing exclusively in deploying Microsoft technologies, official product training, and strategic consulting for overcoming today's business challenges.

The preferred solution provider for many major US and international corporations, The Henson Group is designated an official "Go To" partner for most major products, consistently ranked within the top three consultancies in Microsoft's partner directory (found at: <http://directory.microsoft.com>), holds a seat on the national Microsoft Partner Advisory Council, has direct ties to the product groups, and offers a price guarantee that assures the highest quality service at an unbeatable value.

simplify Sandler O'Neill's messaging environments and dramatically reduce its total cost of ownership.

Consolidating storage across many servers and applications in Sandler O'Neill's environment, this high-performance storage system has the proven ability to continuously serve data at higher than 99.99% availability, and can scale from 50GB to many terabytes using Serial ATA and/or Fibre Channel disk drives.

Additional benefits realized as a result of this migration included:

- Valuable information in e-mail messages was preserved.
- Users retained their folder structure organization.
- Dates, times, senders, recipients, attachments were all preserved, maintaining the history of threaded conversations.
- Scheduled appointments and Task Lists were retained.
- Key address book information such as phone numbers, fax numbers, and mailing addresses was preserved.
- Users can continue to address messages using the 'nicknames' they previously defined.
- Outlook Web Access (OWA) was configured.
- Mobility features in Exchange were leveraged to supplement Blackberry devices and provide an alternative to their users.

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