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The Headache of Managing an Email Service
Top 10 Reasons to Outsource

White Paper
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How will you provide competitive email and messaging services?

Email is a powerful and important application to subscribers – too important to ignore when bundling services or seeking subscriber loyalty. Customers expect email as part of a broader Internet service offering, and are happy to receive it as a 'benefit' associated with a membership or subscription. A December 2007 Pew Internet survey confirms that the top Internet activity is sending and reading email, as reported by 92% of adults online in the United States alone.

However, email is the most prone to vulnerabilities such as spam, viruses and malware. Email is a mission-critical application and one of the primary reasons subscribers will leave a provider.

The real question is not whether but *how* you will provide email service. Will you do it in-house or outsource it? And will you offer a high-quality, competitive email service with guaranteed levels of availability, spam and virus protection, support for different access methods, and collaboration tools, or will you provide a bare-bones, basic service?

The decision to provide email yourself or outsource it depends on how you answer the question about email service quality. While a basic email service package can be implemented in-house, providing subscribers with high service levels and a competitive offering is a much more demanding proposition, requiring:

- Redundant equipment
- Staffing to manage and monitor the email and network infrastructure
- Overtime or holiday coverage to ensure availability around the clock
- Constantly-updated virus and spam protection for your customers and network
- Storage administration to handle the growth of mailboxes and protect data against loss
- On-going engineering and product development costs to keep service offering competitive

You should consider both the risks and benefits of offering email service as you decide exactly how to implement your email service offering:

Benefits	
Customer adoption	Email service can be a deciding factor for customers comparing service providers.
Marketing/visibility	If a branded email service is good, customers will use it, providing a "viral marketing" benefit.
Customer retention	A high-quality email service increases customer loyalty and makes switching vendors difficult.
Risks	
Expense without returns	If the email service lacks the functionality or storage the customer expects, they will not use it. You will have undertaken the expense of the service without realizing its benefits (above).
Overall Quality of Service (QoS)	If email service quality is poor, with outages or an increase in viruses and spam, it reflects poorly on your brand and impacts customer satisfaction. Customers may assume that your other services will be suspect as well.
Customer churn	Email is important to customers. If they are unhappy with your email service, they may switch all of their services to another vendor.

Providing a reliable, full-featured and secure messaging solution reduces the risks and maximizes the benefits of offering an email service to your subscribers. If this is your objective, there are strong arguments

for outsourcing, as long as the provider offers email service with the above characteristics. In fact, there are at least ten good reasons for outsourcing email.

1   Outsourcing delivers a rapid, successful deployment.

Outsourcing delivers a benefit from the onset of service by accelerating the deployment phase.

If you plan to implement an email service in-house, you will need to install, configure and test a complete infrastructure to deploy the email service. To provide high service levels, this infrastructure must include:

- Redundant, carrier-class server infrastructure with no single point of failure and load balancing/failover capabilities
- Redundant or highly available storage for mailboxes
- No downtime migration of customer data
- Email software or appliances with ample data storage
- Integrated and up-to-date spam and virus protection
- Management, monitoring and administration infrastructure
- Technical support infrastructure to handle customer calls/queries
- A specialized abuse team to ensure mail delivery and fight spammers

Implementing this in-house can be expensive, will take significant time, and requires specialized staff. With an outsourced solution, deployment of a private-label email service is rapid, as the hardware, software, storage, and administrative infrastructure already exists and you are simply tapping into it.

2   Outsourcing reduces capital expenditures.

Implementing an email service in-house will require capital hardware expenditures including:

- Hardware and software licenses for redundant email, anti-spam and anti-virus servers
- Additional web and application servers for web-based email
- Redundant (mirrored or RAID) storage for mailboxes, with sufficient capacity to meet near-term storage requirements

In addition, you will need the necessary data center infrastructure, including network bandwidth, power supply and rack space as well as monitoring/management software.

Outsourcing the email service eliminates these up-front capital expenditures; you pay a service fee based on the number of mailboxes and features when you need. This model is referred to as 'pay as you grow', which allows a more efficient use of resources.

3   Your staff stays focused on the core business.

Subscribers expect email with bundled service packages. However, email may not be one of your core competencies. Running a highly available, competitive email service requires a good deal of dedicated staff time, including;

- Experienced email administrator(s) to set up and maintain the system
- Technical support staff to handle customer questions about email service

- Storage and system administrators to handle the infrastructure
- Ongoing engineering and product development to keep messaging service competitive

The fully-loaded costs of these personnel are significant. Even if you are using existing staff to perform these functions, you will be diverting time from their primary job function of providing the services on which you have built your business.

Datamation reported the following average or median annual salaries for the following information technology professionals in 2007:
- Database Administrator - $86,790[1]
- Systems Security Administrator - $70,500 - $99,750[2]

4   Spam and viruses require constant vigilance.

The email threat landscape is changing regularly. Viruses, directory harvests, denial of service attacks, mail bombs and other forms of spam dominate the list of threats. The Messaging Anti-Abuse Working Group (MAAWG) distributed their October 2007 *Email Metrics Report* citing over 82% of all message traffic as abusive email. And *The Top Ten: Spam Filter Review 2006* determined that daily spam emails sent in 2006 totaled 12.4 billion messages, or 2,200 spam email received annually per person.

Spammers constantly figure out new techniques to slip by existing spam filters, leveraging armies of "botnets" to swamp mail systems with unwanted offers and scams. And the virus landscape changes regularly as well, requiring constant updates to anti-virus signatures.

If you are offering an email service, you have to address security and abuse issues:

- Spam is costly in terms of bandwidth and storage, while viruses can easily overload and shut down your servers.
- Your customers/subscribers will stop using their email accounts if spam is out of control or their systems are infected with viruses.

Spam protection and security require a multi-layered defense with constant signature updates that do not impact quality of service. In many cases, users may want to control the sensitivity of the spam filters, or identify specific 'approved' senders. Furthermore, spam and virus protection needs frequent upgrades, as attackers and spammers are continuously adjusting their tactics to get around existing defenses. Spam and malware are not problems you solve only once; you need to dedicate resources to the fight on an ongoing basis.

If you outsource email service, you can choose a service that maintains up-to-date virus and spam protection, and dedicates the time and energy to staying current with the threat landscape. Generally this service offering is bundled with the mailbox, and therefore a fixed cost.

5   A highly-available email infrastructure optimizes uptime.

If you plan to offer a high-quality, highly available email service, you need to minimize all downtime, both planned and unplanned. Doing so requires an email infrastructure with redundancy and failover capabilities

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[1] Datamation, *IT Salary Watch: Database Administrator*, September 12, 2007.
[2] Datamation, *2007 Salary: Systems Security Administrator*, October 16, 2006.

that protect the service from individual failures, deployed on a fault-tolerant network. The mailbox storage must be redundant. The platform needs full backups of all email data, with offsite storage to protect from a site-wide problem, and the ability to recover data rapidly in the case of failures.

Building such an infrastructure takes both time and expertise. By partnering with a mature email service provider, you have instant access to a highly-available email infrastructure deployed in a data center with physical security and around-the-clock administration. You can examine the vendor's track record in providing downtime-free service and their service level (SLA) guarantee to get a good idea of the availability you can expect for your service. Experienced email vendors generally guarantee 99.9% availability including planned and unplanned downtime. Providing this kind of service and availability in-house is difficult and time-consuming.

6   You can keep up with market.

Experienced messaging vendors are constantly raising the bar on what consumers expect from email service. It's no longer enough to offer a basic POP email account. Your users want and expect:

- Full-featured web-based email with ample storage
- Instant, 'push' email delivery to smart phones and mobile devices
- Complementary services including online storage, secure email and archiving

Likewise, business users expect more of the functionality they have with desktop email applications, including collaboration tools like a calendar and additional full-feature, next generation Ajax capabilities.

Your email service must keep pace with changing customer expectations. If you are providing service in-house, you have to keep investing time and effort into the email infrastructure and upgrades – and rolling out new features without disrupting service or reliability.

An outsourced email provider already does this – their core business is software as a service (SaaS) email, so keeping current with changing technologies is part of what they do. They take care of the engineering behind the changes and implementation of new feature roll-outs.

7   Your email costs are known and predictable.

If you choose to outsource email, the cost of email services is known, fixed, and predictable. It is also very affordable when compared with the true cost of providing email service in-house.

It can be difficult to determine the actual costs of providing email service in-house. The Total Cost of Ownership includes:

- Up-front capital expenditures on infrastructure, service and storage
- Ongoing server and storage upgrades to support growing usage/volumes of data
- Ongoing staff costs in server, storage and email administration
- Ongoing staff costs in technical support

These numbers do not factor in the hidden costs of lost customers if there are any email service problems. With outsourced email, your true costs are known and fixed.

8   You retain control over the service.

One of the essential reasons for doing email in-house is that you want to retain control over provisioning, billing, etc. But today's private-label, outsourced email systems are designed to integrate with your business processes and systems. Web-based management consoles give you immediate control over the service, while APIs support complete integration with provisioning and billing systems.

9   Did we mention compliance?

If you have business customers, you have to consider compliance issues. Industry-specific regulations specify data security, availability, protection and retention requirements that your customers may need to observe. Your email system will need to support these requirements. Here again, having an outsourced email solution means that your messaging provider is investing the resources to do this, not your own internal staff.

10 Improve your customer's quality of experience.

This tenth reason is potentially the most important of them all: by outsourcing, you can provide a differentiated, high-quality email service that enhances the overall quality of your customer's experience with your service.

Can secure, fully-featured email make your other services look better? Sure, particularly if customers come to rely on and use the email service heavily. Can an unreliable service make your other services look worse? Again, yes. Customers do not necessarily distinguish between the quality of the various services you offer. Email downtime, spam or viruses will make them suspicious about the care you put into other services as well.

Summary

If you plan to offer email services to customers/subscribers, you have the choice of supporting the service in-house or outsourcing it. You may think that you can leverage existing infrastructure and expertise to add email support in-house, and indeed this is a viable option for many companies. But if you want to offer differentiated, full-featured and secure email with high reliability levels, outsourcing is a much more attractive and compelling option. Outsourcing lets you concentrate on your core business and delegate email service delivery to someone else whose expertise is email. This helps you keep current in security, features, and high availability without a continuous investment in time and resources beyond the cost of the email application.

And if you do plan to outsource, be sure that your outsourced email provider has a proven track record and can satisfy the ten reasons described in this paper.

The Everyone.net Advantage

Everyone.net (www.everyone.net), based in Sunnyvale, California, delivers highly reliable, secure, hosted email and messaging solutions for service providers and businesses worldwide. The company provides the advantages of carrier-class email without the expense or complexity, enabling customers to focus on what they do best.

Everyone.net's customizable messaging solutions are built on a highly scalable infrastructure and include advanced services such as IMAP, mobile push email, collaboration tools, comprehensive anti-spam and virus protection as well as value-added services such as online storage, registered email and archiving.

Managing over 4.5 billion messaging connections per month, Everyone.net is trusted by service providers such as Netscape Communications and Buckeye CableSystem and business clients including Wolfgang Puck restaurants, True Value Hardware and Kaplan University.

Visit us at www.everyone.net and find out how we can help you save money and increase subscriber satisfaction.

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