



City in the cloud

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By Patrick Marshall

D.C. makes a gradual move to Google Apps, with an emphasis on training

Vivek Kundra began thinking about the advantages of cloud computing in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks, when he saw the broken lines of communication, particularly in the area of public safety.

On the day of the attacks, Kundra was interviewing for the job of network services director in Arlington County, Va., near the Pentagon, a job he got. When Kundra became chief technology officer for Washington, D.C., in March 2007, he decided to move the city government to Google's suite of Internet-based enterprise applications. They provide anytimeanywhere access and a collaborative environment, and they cost less than traditional applications.

The city's offices are employing three primary tools from Google: Google Enterprise, which includes personal Web sites, e-mail and the Google Applications suite of productivity tools; Google search appliances, which are used to index and search everything on the city's intranet; and Google Earth.

The move to Google applications is a gradual one. Kundra said the city purchased licenses for 38,000 people. "Around 5,000 people are actively using it as we speak," Kundra said. "We have another 3,000 people going through migration."

As for the rest of District of Columbia employees, "we're not mandating anything right now," Kundra said. The usual migration route to Google Apps is when an employee or a group supervisor requests it.

When such a request is made, classes, managed by Next Tier Concepts, are arranged for the group.

"Last month, we did eight days' worth of training, which amounted to 32 classes," said Edward Tuorinsky, director of professional services at Next Tier Concepts.

Tuorinsky said the classes vary from four people to about 20. The introductory class covers general principles of cloud computing and the basics of the applications.

There's also a second-level class available that focuses on Google Sites, which lets individuals manage their own Web sites.

"Overall, people were very receptive in picking it up," Tuorinsky said. "Once they understood that everything was out there and how they could access it, that was probably the biggest step for them. The functionality and the individual applications are pretty intuitive, even simplistic."

Kundra said the move to cloud computing must fit different employees.

User profiles

"I've got one profile of employees who come from a generation where the Internet was always available," Kundra said. "The second profile I have is of employees who have been here for 30 or 40 years and are used to a set of tools. The third profile I have is a set of employees who either don't use technology as a core function of their jobs or are not very familiar with it."

That situation puts a premium on flexibility and training. "What we find is different levels of adoption, and the way we're solving that is through intense training," he said.

As a result of different employee backgrounds and job requirements, Kundra said, he expects the move to Google Apps to be gradual and uneven. "We're in a hybrid environment right now. We're using Google Spreadsheets and Google Docs, and we're also using the Microsoft suite."

Kundra said he recognizes that cloud computing is not appropriate for all government users.

"If there is a national security requirement for data, I would not host that in a cloud," he said.

The move to Google Apps has so far been a success, Kundra said. "We did our budget planning with a group of 60 people using Google Docs," he said. "Could we have done that with Microsoft Word? Absolutely, though we would've ended up with about 60 documents, and we would've had to compile them together."