



Lowe Enterprises

Real Estate and Property Investment Company Enhances User Productivity and Collaboration

Overview

Country: United States

Industry: Real Estate

Customer Profile

Lowe Enterprises is a diversified, vertically integrated, national real estate organization active in commercial, hospitality, and residential property investment, management, and development. Lowe is headquartered in Los Angeles and employs 7,000 people.

Business Situation

Lowe users needed an easier way to manage documents, use e-mail, and collaborate with clients and suppliers, and the company needed a more efficient way of providing remote e-mail.

Solution

Lowe is upgrading its client environment to Microsoft® Office Professional Edition 2003 (with a focus on Office Outlook® 2003) and its portal solution to Office SharePoint™ Portal Server 2003, while consolidating its mail servers from three down to one.

Benefits

- Increased user productivity
- Simplified document management
- Decreased spam (by 90 percent)
- Enhanced e-mail and collaboration
- Licensing and administrative savings of \$80,000 in 2003 and \$40,000 yearly
- Project management savings of \$60,000 yearly

“With the deployment of Microsoft Office 2003 and SharePoint 2003, everyone is able to work more productively and collaboratively.”

Keith Fletcher, Senior Vice President, Lowe Enterprises

A diversified, vertically integrated real estate organization, Lowe Enterprises has developed, acquired, or managed more than \$6 billion of real estate assets in the United States and Europe since its founding in 1970. To maintain its competitive position in a dynamic marketplace, Lowe works hard to establish processes and procedures that enable its employees to manage documents and collaborate with clients and suppliers efficiently and cost-effectively. Toward that end, Lowe is deploying solutions based on Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003 and Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003 that are designed to streamline e-mail communications, enhance collaboration, and simplify document management. The anticipated results are a one-time savings of \$80,000 and yearly savings of \$40,000 in licensing and administration and \$60,000 in document and project management.

“The deployment of Office 2003] translates into lower overhead and reduced administrative fees for Lowe, which we can translate into value for investors and enhanced opportunities for continuing growth.”

Keith Fletcher, Senior Vice President, Lowe Enterprises

Situation

To maintain its competitive edge, Lowe Enterprises IT executives make a point of addressing challenges before they become problems. Recently, Lowe faced challenges in the way it managed documentation and used e-mail activities that are simultaneously commonplace and vital to the functioning of a successful business in a volatile marketplace.

As Senior Vice President Keith Fletcher explains, with the growth in complexity and volume of documentation in the dynamic world of real estate investment and management, Lowe’s predominantly non-technical users faced difficulty in saving, retrieving, and sharing documents both locally and on the company’s wide area network. “The company had deployed a Microsoft® SharePoint™ Portal Server 2001 site in early 2002, but it was underutilized due the perception that it was too complex for the average user,” Fletcher says. “As a result, user productivity was threatened even as help-desk resources were stretched.”

E-mail was another concern. “With the typical user processing up to 100 messages per day, it became increasingly tricky for users to manage the load,” Fletcher reports. “In one case, we came near to missing out on a multimillion-dollar request for proposal when it was nearly overlooked in the huge volume of incoming messages.”

Employees outside the corporate office, who constitute 80 percent of Lowe’s user base, faced particular difficulties. Working in small, widely distributed offices or on the road^{3/4}as is common in the property management industry^{3/4} these users routinely depended on low-bandwidth frame relay connections and frequently experienced difficulties in retrieving mail due to bandwidth restrictions or a slowdown in the central mail server.

“We resolved the situation at major offices by installing mail servers at those locations, but they posed challenges of their own in terms of licensing, maintenance, and support,” Fletcher explains. “Neither did this approach help the smaller offices, which did not have the staffing to justify the installation of mail servers there.”

Solution

In response to the challenges the company faced in document management and remote e-mail access, Lowe IT managers decided to upgrade the client environment from Microsoft Office 2000 and Office XP to Office Professional Edition 2003, with a focus on the Office Outlook® 2003 e-mail and collaboration client. In addition, the company will upgrade to Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003.

Taking advantage of the advanced capabilities of Outlook 2003, Lowe will decommission its remote servers running Microsoft Exchange Server version 5.5 and consolidate all mail-server activity on a single Exchange 2000 Server-based system at headquarters that will ultimately be upgraded to Exchange Server 2003.

Slated for completion in late 2003, the project also will include the upgrade of selected enterprise servers from the Microsoft Windows® 2000 Server operating system to Windows Server™ 2003. This move will enable IT staff to use Windows Server 2003 Group Policy and IntelliMirror® management technologies in the deployment of Office Professional Edition 2003 and SharePoint Portal Server 2003, and will enable SharePoint to exploit the workspace integration capabilities of the Office Edition.

Initially, the SharePoint Portal Server deployment will encompass portals at 10 construction sites supporting a total of 50 users. Each SharePoint portal will support a

single construction project, including documentation, bids, diagrams, schedules, invoicing, bills of lading, and so forth. An extranet attachment, enabled through the upgrade and secured with the help of Windows Server 2003 Group Policy security identifiers, will expedite communications and collaboration with contractors and subcontractors, while Microsoft ASP.NET forms will support access to a SQL Server™ 2000 database.

Benefits

Server Consolidation

Early results of the Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003 deployment received rave reviews from users. Most frequently noted were capabilities such as side-by-side and shared calendars, search folders, and enhanced mail filtering, which Fletcher says reduced spam initially by a whopping 90 percent.

“With such a dramatic reduction in spam and thereby a similar reduction in the overall volume of mail, we’re a lot less likely to risk overlooking vital messages, like that multimillion-dollar request for proposal that was almost missed,” Fletcher says. “We can also make vital messages like that even more noticeable with the color-coded message flagging provided by Outlook 2003.” Even bigger benefits are anticipated once remote users can begin to take advantage of the cached-mode capabilities of Outlook

2003. As Fletcher explains, with the Outlook cached mode the remote client PCs become virtually immune, from the users’ point of view, to server or network slowdowns. “This means greatly improved performance, so users are less likely to turn to less efficient forms of communication such as phone and fax,” he says.

More important, the technology will support the hosting of all e-mail users on Lowe’s central Exchange server. This move is expected to enhance reliability and enable the decommissioning of remote mail servers for significant savings in maintenance, licensing fees, and administration.

“Having all e-mail managed through a single server at the company’s protected data center will give us a more reliable mail system and will help the company to avoid having to support and upgrade its remote servers from Microsoft Exchange Server 5.5 to Exchange 2000 Server,” Fletcher points out. “All together, the consolidation will provide Lowe with direct savings of \$80,000 in 2003 and \$40,000 yearly.”

Simplified and Enhanced Document Collaboration

The SharePoint Portal Server 2003 installation also is playing a sizable role in the Lowe Enterprises environment. For starters, comprehensive links between that product and Office Professional 2003 will enable users to save Office documents to the portal as easily as they can save them to their hard drive.

“This will reduce version-control problems by replacing the traditional ‘e-mail plus attachment’ approach to document distribution with a shared-folder approach that ensures users are accessing the most recent version,” Fletcher notes. “It also will enable Lowe to provide updated information to contractors proactively without time-

Streamlining Management and Communications with SharePoint Portal Server 2003

Average number of ongoing construction projects at a given time	10
Document management and communication hours saved yearly on each project	120
Average weighted cost of each such hour	\$50
Document management and communication costs saved yearly	\$60,000

“By providing a simple way to do online reporting and distribution, executives, project managers, and administrative personnel will reduce the time they spend on day-to-day communications.”

Chris Stewart, Manager of Help Desk/Client Services, Lowe Enterprises

consuming intervention on the part of Lowe staff.”

In addition, SharePoint Portal Server will support consistency through online form generation for internal and external users alike, and enhanced communications with clients through integration with Webcams that record progress flows at various construction sites. According to Chris Stewart, Manager of Help Desk/Client Services, these advances will mean a savings of roughly \$60,000 per year in the time spent on document production and distribution and related communications.

“By providing a simple way to do online reporting and distribution, executives, project managers, and administrative personnel will reduce the time they spend on day-to-day communications,” Stewart explains. “Even better, we’ll completely eliminate the labor-intensive production and overnight mailing of 2,000 pages of project-status content quarterly to project sites throughout the United States and beyond.”

Fletcher concurs on the benefits of a streamlined approach to document management and collaboration. “With the deployment of Microsoft Office 2003 and SharePoint 2003, everyone is able to work more productively and collaboratively^{3/4}users in offices exchanging e-mail with clients, managers and project supervisors reviewing documents in the field, contractors and subcontractors providing project updates, and IT administrators who can more easily focus their energies on a consolidated server base,” he says. “This translates into lower overhead and reduced administrative fees for Lowe, which we can translate into value for investors and enhanced opportunities for continuing growth.”

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Microsoft Office System

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Software and Services

■ Products

- Microsoft® Windows Server™ 2003
- Microsoft Windows® 2000 Server
- Microsoft .NET Framework
- Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003
- Microsoft SharePoint™ Portal Server 2003
- Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000
- Microsoft Exchange 2000 Server
- Citrix MetaFrame XP

■ Services

- Microsoft Consulting Services

Hardware

- Dell 6650
- Dell OptiPlex GX100
- Dell Latitude CPX

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