



NARA lashes 3 clouds together to move users to Google Apps

- By [Rutrell Yasin](#)
- May 24, 2013

Over the past few years several successful e-mail migrations have given federal program managers and industry experts a better understanding of the processes and technology needed to move e-mail to the cloud. Still, each migration offers its own unique challenges, depending on the agency's mission and requirements.

For instance, the National Archive and Records Administration's recent transition of 4,500 e-mail users to [Google Apps for Government](#) required complex systems integration work, linking three cloud infrastructures to accommodate NARA's messaging, mobility and records management requirements.

"The unique thing here was the systems integration requirement where we integrated three clouds together," said Steve Kousen, partner and vice-president of federal engineering and cloud computing services at Unisys, the primary contractor on the project.

NARA and Unisys worked with other partners to link Google Apps for Government's messaging and collaboration services to Exchange My Mail, a provider of BlackBerry hosting services; and ZL Technologies, which offers a cloud-based records management solution. ZL Technologies' Unified Archive suite supports Defense Department 5015 certification for records management, a key NARA requirement.

NARA's move to the cloud is designed to give agency employees secure and efficient access to e-mail and data while cutting operational costs and improving system uptime and availability. NARA officials wanted cloud e-mail, calendaring, contacts, and co-authoring and editing of documents within Google, Kousen said. And they wanted BlackBerry handheld devices and smart phones to connect with Google Apps. Putting the BlackBerry services in the cloud frees the agency from maintaining BlackBerry Enterprise Servers on premise.

Unisys integrated additional authentication devices within NARA's directory services to verify users' identities as they log into Google Apps, providing two-factor authentication for users and secure extensions to the multiple cloud infrastructures.

The company was able to apply lessons it learned helping the General Services Administration, the [National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration](#) and most recently the Energy Department's [Idaho National Laboratory](#) transition thousands of workers' e-mail and collaboration services to Google Apps for Government.

The complex integration issues at NARA required building collaborative teams consisting of subject matter experts from the agency and Unisys, Kousen said. Called Integrated Project Teams, the experts were grouped into areas based on their expertise, such as e-mail routing, engineering, records management or security. They made sure they understood the requirements and then began designing solutions with the goal of completing the transition in six months.

“We put a lot of emphasis on organizational change management,” Kousen said. This helped the Office of the CIO communicate with everyone in the agency, informing them of why the agency was moving to the cloud and what the benefits would be. Unisys complemented that high-level message with more tactical communications, advising the workforce on how they needed to prepare for the transition and offering training.

As the keeper of the nation’s records, NARA had a strong emphasis around the records management pieces associated with e-mail and collaboration. The records management component requires special attention because of the compliance and regulatory issues related to archiving of records, Kousen noted.

“First and foremost are the policies that have to be decided on with the configuration of records management systems,” Kousen said. Unisys has designed systems around Google Vault, the company’s records management system, although for this implementation the systems integrator went with ZL Technologies’ solution. Regardless of the solution, managers have to decide what policies are they going to implement and how – for example, by roles, seniority or functions. Managers have to determine how long they are going to keep records, which can vary depending on the different roles. For example, agencies might want to keep legal records for a long time or until an issue is resolved.

In any case, managers will want to make sure user interaction with a cloud-based records management system is as seamless as possible. For example, a user must be able to easily tag a document for long-term records management within the Web browser.

“The measure of care you take around designing the integration pieces is very critical,” Kousen said.

NARA in 2010 released guidance to make federal records officers more aware of the implications of moving records management to cloud infrastructures. At the time, NARA officials said that cloud applications could lack the capability to maintain records in a way that maintains their functionality and integrity throughout the records’ full lifecycle.

However, in August 2012, an Office of Management and Budget directive put NARA in charge of overseeing the development of a robust records management framework based on cloud architecture, secure storage and analytical tools. The directive outlined a number of action items that should be completed by December 2013.

About the Author

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