

IBM helps peace officers' association improve communication and collaboration

Overview

■ **The Challenge**

The California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) suffered from an unstable messaging platform. Employees traveling outside the office had no way to access collaborative applications and the messaging platform did not integrate with the membership database, leading to organizational inefficiencies.

■ **Why IBM?**

IBM offers a reliable messaging system that can run on a variety of operating systems—including Linux®—and can be accessed via the Web and with PDAs.

■ **The Solution**

CCPOA implemented a flexible infrastructure for e-mail, calendaring and scheduling as well as custom collaborative applications using IBM® Lotus Notes®, IBM Lotus® Domino® Collaboration Express and IBM Lotus Domino Web Access running on IBM eServer™ xSeries® servers

■ **Key Benefits**

- Integration between the messaging platform and the membership database means the association is better equipped to communicate with members via accurate, up-to-date e-mail distribution lists
- Web and BlackBerry-enabled e-mail, calendaring and scheduling help increase the productivity of field staff



Craig Haarmeyer, Information Services Specialist, California Correctional Peace Officers Association

- Increased system uptime and decreased service calls help lower the total cost of ownership.

The long arm of the law can reach only as far as its communication network permits, but now the California Correctional Peace Officers Association can reach a little farther. A private, not-for-profit association representing correctional peace officers working in the California correctional system, the CCPOA is one of the largest professional associations in the state. With a membership of over 30,000 officers, CCPOA is headquartered in Sacramento and has several field offices supporting its 160 employees.

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*—Craig Haarmeyer,
Information Services Specialist,
California Correctional Peace
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Key Components

Software

- IBM Lotus Notes
- IBM Lotus Domino Collaboration Express
- IBM Lotus Domino Web Access 6.5
- Intravision OnTime Group Calendar

Server

- IBM eServer xSeries 255
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CCPOA seeks to correct its messaging and collaboration capabilities

As recently as 2003, it was the CCPOA internal messaging system that was in need of a few corrections. Based on Microsoft® Exchange, the system was difficult to access, hard to integrate and very unreliable. “Microsoft Exchange was unstable and inflexible,” says Craig Haarmeyer, information services specialist at CCPOA. “And because it is proprietary and platform-dependent, we were limited in terms of accessibility and integration.”

In fact, the Microsoft Exchange server was so unstable that it began to pose a significant drain on productivity and morale. “I never got any sleep,” explains Haarmeyer. “I’d be in bed or taking my kids to school and my phone would ring—I would have to walk somebody through the procedure of restarting the server. It was ridiculous. It got to the point where we would just cross our fingers and reboot.”

Additionally, many of the CCPOA staff members were often working on the road—and when they were outside the office, they had no way to access the messaging system through the Web or their PDAs. “Our senior staff couldn’t function in the field the same way they could inside the office,” says Haarmeyer. “Most importantly, they couldn’t access their e-mail or calendars once they left the office.”

Also, because Microsoft Exchange could not integrate with the association’s IBM Informix® membership database, CCPOA had to rely on manually generated e-mail distribution lists for communication with its members. “We’d have people in our membership department entering and updating the database,” explains Haarmeyer. “And then we’d have other people creating e-mail distribution lists by hand, and then different people editing contact information. It was time-consuming, error-prone and inefficient.”

CCPOA puts the cuffs on platform-dependent messaging and collaboration

After experiencing the pain of the proprietary Exchange-based messaging, Haarmeyer decided it was time for a new, platform-independent collaborative application. In particular, he wanted one that could be accessed from the Web and PDAs, integrate with the association's Informix database and run on a variety of operating systems, including Linux or UNIX®. He considered pursuing an open-source solution but wanted to be sure that the new system would be supported well into the future. "As an organization, we rely more and more on e-mail and calendaring functionality," explains Haarmeyer. "Because we depend on it so much, we wanted something with greater support than the open-source options."

Because he was pleased with the IBM Informix system already in place at CCPOA, he contacted PreferredPartner.com, an IBM reseller, to discuss potential IBM-based solutions. "We've been incredibly satisfied and impressed with IBM and Informix," says Haarmeyer, "so we decided to consider a solution based on IBM Lotus software."

CCPOA and PreferredPartner.com brought in GreyDuck Technology, an IBM Advanced Business Partner and Service Provider specializing in Lotus Notes and Domino messaging solutions. "When GreyDuck explained the benefits of an architecture based on Lotus Notes and Domino, we realized that it is much more than just a messaging platform," explains Haarmeyer. "We could integrate our messaging infrastructure with our other database systems and take advantage of the Domino rapid application development environment to write custom applications."

IBM Lotus Domino Collaboration Express delivers powerful messaging and calendaring

With help from GreyDuck, CCPOA migrated 160 users from Microsoft Outlook and Exchange to IBM Lotus Notes and Domino. Lotus Notes and Domino provides CCPOA's employees with e-mail, calendaring and scheduling capabilities. GreyDuck also introduced IBM Lotus Domino Web Access, which allows mobile CCPOA staff to access the messaging environment through a Web browser. The Lotus solution is deployed on two IBM eServer xSeries servers running on the Red Hat Linux operating system.

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CCPOA employees were very impressed with the extensive out-of-the-box functionality in Lotus Domino Collaboration Express. “Our users are delighted at how much more powerful the Lotus software is compared to what we were using before,” says Haarmeyer. “For example, the scheduling capability is very powerful. You can invite various parties and identify the best dates and times to schedule a meeting based on a view of their mutual availability. You can check on the availability of rooms and manage resources such as projectors. It’s really much better than Exchange.”

Custom applications help keep members connected

Lotus Domino Collaboration Express is a powerful platform for deploying collaborative applications. GreyDuck used the Lotus Connector LotusScript® Extension to develop a custom Lotus Domino application that integrates with the organization’s Informix database, facilitating the automatic creation of e-mail distribution lists. With this capability, CCPOA can now communicate much more efficiently and effectively with its membership. In particular, the association can create targeted e-mail distribution lists that are accurate and up-to-date. “By delivering the right message to the right people at the right location, we can better serve our members,” says Haarmeyer.

GreyDuck also implemented connectivity software that allowed traveling employees access to their e-mail and scheduling applications using a BlackBerry or other portable device. “Now, no matter where our employees are, they are connected,” says Haarmeyer. “People out in the field can access e-mail, calendaring and scheduling functionality with ease using either a Web browser or a BlackBerry.”

GreyDuck also customized Lotus Notes calendaring for CPPOA with special group calendaring features. “In one view, you can see the various entries in people’s calendars,” says Haarmeyer. “And we can create different calendar views for different groupings of people.”

IT staff can finally sleep at night

Lower administration costs have been a major advantage of switching to Lotus Domino Collaboration Express, and this new messaging and collaboration platform has facilitated a further cost-saving measure. “In addition to switching from Microsoft Exchange to Lotus Domino, we also switched from Microsoft Windows® to the Linux operating system, which has saved a lot in licensing and support costs,” Haarmeyer explains. “In many ways, the transition to Linux would not have been possible without the robust messaging and scheduling functionality in Lotus Domino Collaboration Express. In fact, Lotus Domino Collaboration Express offers a lot more out-of-the-box functionality than we had in our old environment after many years of tweaking Exchange.”

Still, of all of the benefits he has realized, Haarmeyer is especially pleased with the stability and reliability of the Lotus Notes and Domino messaging system. Not only has it increased uptime and reduced service calls, lowering the total cost of ownership of the system, it has also allowed Haarmeyer to rest easier. “The system has gone down only twice in the past two years,” he says, “and both times were due to power failure. I can finally sleep at night!”

For more information

For more information, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit: ibm.com/software/lotus

To learn more about GreyDuck Technology, visit: greyduck.com

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