



Company Brings Developmental Therapy Closer to Families, Thanks to Office 365

Overview

Country or Region: Canada
Industry: Professional Services/Healthcare

Customer Profile

blueballoon offers a comprehensive approach to pediatric healthcare, serving children with a wide range of needs related to development, learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and more.

Business Situation

With more than a hundred employees working across multiple sites, blueballoon needed to provide easy access to email and collaboration tools with a solution that was simple to manage and use remotely.

Solution

Microsoft Office 365 brought cloud-based email, productivity, and virtual conferencing tools to blueballoon's distributed workforce, saving time and enabling better service.

Benefits

- Anywhere access to tools
- Simple, affordable deployment
- Easy virtual conferencing

We've been trying to collaborate across multiple sites for years. Office 365 has allowed us to actually achieve that.

Stephen MacEwen, CEO and Co-Founder, blueballoon Health Services

Inspired by a family who understood the challenges of finding pediatric services, blueballoon Health Services takes a unique approach to healthcare delivery. "Our business model involves running multiple centers in multiple communities," says CEO and co-founder Stephen MacEwen. "We want to be in our families' communities, rather than having them travel long distances."

Thanks to the comprehensive package of cloud-based software that comes with Office 365, blueballoon's therapists can work nearly anywhere. The company chose Office 365 over Google Apps for its easy-to-manage access to email, calendar sharing, chat, and other collaboration tools. Now, therapists can quickly share information and expert advice with each other. And it's all simple enough that no IT support is needed for remote workers. MacEwen says that today, Office 365 is core to the way blueballoon works.



Situation

In 2004, Stephen MacEwen was frustrated with driving all over Toronto in search of developmental services for his three-year-old son. So he teamed up with his sister, Heather MacEwen, an occupational therapist, to make pediatric healthcare more accessible to families.

Today, with four locations in the Toronto area, blueballoon Health Services provides motor, social-emotional, speech, behavior, and academic developmental support. "Our services are often hands-on, in the field," says MacEwen. "There are huge rural areas where families can't get to treatment centers very easily. So we're constantly faced with trying to develop tools on a platform that will allow us to reach markets in which a satellite facility is not cost-effective."

Of the company's approximately 120 employees, more than half work offsite regularly. From the beginning, blueballoon has relied on cloud-based tools to reach these remote workers. However, although NetSuite worked well for ERP and CRM, MacEwen says it fell short in group productivity tools. For email, blueballoon turned to an open source IMAP server, but the therapists who were working with patients in the field couldn't easily get to their email from smartphones and other mobile devices, and lacked calendaring.

MacEwen says blueballoon needed a solution that would better reach his distributed workforce, while being simple enough to manage away from the office. In addition, blueballoon's therapists wanted a better way to work with each other by easily scheduling a meeting or a quick, impromptu virtual chat—no matter where they happened to be working.

Solution

MacEwen and blueballoon looked to the cloud for a solution, and strongly considered Google Apps as part of a portfolio of cloud applications. However, despite a number of planned integrations, the solution was going to be complex for users to work through day to day. "Our employees are not advanced IT users. They use IT as a means to an end. Getting a portfolio of tools integrated is complicated, and hard for a small organization like ours to administer, but it's also hard for the users."

However, once the team learned about Microsoft Office 365, an online service which unites familiar Microsoft Office applications with email, calendaring, collaboration, and communication solutions, the decision was made.

"Once we took a look at Office 365, it clearly beat out the other option," says MacEwen. "I've always been on Outlook. It's obviously the killer application, and so the idea of unlocking the full features of Outlook without having to host our own Exchange server was appealing."

Office 365 includes Exchange Online for email, which is easy to access from nearly any smartphone, tablet, or computer. Lync Online and Office Web Apps are also available using the same login, so therapists can get to their tools no matter where they are. "We've been trying to collaborate across multiple tools for years. Office 365 has allowed us to actually achieve that," says MacEwen.

Another challenge that comes with a distributed workforce is how to deploy new technology. MacEwen had been through IT deployments before, and he was wary of the challenges in setup and maintenance. Microsoft recommended IT partner VI

Professional Solutions to support the implementation, and the transition progressed quickly and smoothly. MacEwen was then pleasantly surprised with how easily his workers could activate and start using their subscription-based accounts, with no IT support. "You can go in and, with a couple of clicks, download the application. It's much more self-serve than our previous solutions," he says.

Even more surprising was how Lync Online changed the way his staff could work together through calendar sharing, IM tools, and quick virtual conferencing. "When we realized that Lync was fully integrated into our Outlook experience, our people were just ecstatic about that," MacEwen says.

Benefits

Thanks to the combination of Exchange and Lync, MacEwen calls Office 365 a slam dunk. "All our information is right there," he says. "Having access to all their tools and calendar helps our employees manage their time more efficiently. That contributes to being able to take on more appointments."

Bridging a Distributed Workforce

Before, coordinating among 120 employees was a challenge. For the first time, Office 365 has truly brought all of blueballoon together under the same virtual roof. "How would you possibly stay in touch with this number of people if you didn't have a tool like this? It just doesn't seem possible," says MacEwen.

Simple, User-Led Deployment

Compared with blueballoon's previous hybrid solution, Office 365 is easier to set up, requires much less administration, and is more streamlined, supporting multiple services with one set of credentials. "With that comes better security, because you've got one point of control on those

accounts," says MacEwen. He says both his end-users and IT team are pleased with its self-service simplicity and integrated experience.

Easy Virtual Conferencing

With Lync Online, users can see whether their coworkers are available simply by looking at the colored dot next to their name. From there, IM, screen sharing, and video chats are easy to initiate. "Now, our therapists can really engage with each other. To see each other and interact in real time, it's critical. They love it," says MacEwen.

Today, virtually everyone in the growing company is on Office 365. Soon, the team will begin using SharePoint Online, included with the package, for file sharing. The entire solution has reduced employees' frustration with IT tools, says MacEwen. "The team is more productive and happier. And because our service is our people, the fact that they're happy with the technology platform is important."

For More Information

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For more information about blueballoon products and services, visit the website at: www.blue-balloon.com

Microsoft Office 365

Microsoft Office 365 brings together cloud versions of our most trusted communications and collaboration products—Microsoft SharePoint Online, Exchange Online, and Lync Online—with the latest version of our Office desktop suite and companion web applications for businesses of all sizes.

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