Government Boosts Service Delivery, Saves Tax Payers Money with Cloud-Based Tools

The Government of the US Virgin Islands (USVI) needed to standardize on a single communication and collaboration solution for employees across 23 agencies. It reduced siloed government functions, automated paper-based business processes, and expedited government services because employees were using the messaging and collaboration technologies in Microsoft Office 365. With a single business productivity solution, USVI employees can provide the same high level of cohesive government services across the territory.

When Reuben Molloy joined the Government of the US Virgin Islands (USVI) as Chief Information Technology Officer, he was charged with choosing a single email solution for a connected network of 23 agencies. Molloy saw this directive as part of a larger vision to enable the government to provide efficient and cost-effective services to all citizens.

Proficient government requires cohesive service delivery and unified collaboration and communication technologies. Until recently, USVI did not have this kind of IT infrastructure. Molloy saw an opportunity to take advantage of cloud computing that would allow USVI to focus on providing better services without worrying about physical infrastructure or data security.

"The real mission was to facilitate the business of government by changing the culture of computing at USVI," he says. "Microsoft Office 365 offered us much more than cloud-based email. With everyone using the same communication and collaboration tools, the divisions between our agencies are disappearing. We can work better together to improve government services for our citizens."

Disjointed Operations

USVI agencies used everything from old versions of Microsoft Exchange Server to personal, web-based email accounts. "It didn't reflect well on the government when Commissioners were using personal email accounts to apply for grants," says Molloy. "It didn't help with cohesive service delivery if we couldn't share calendars, or if it took a day to get to a meeting on another island."

USVI staffers did not have a collaboration solution for virtual teamwork and everyone relied on paper-based processes. "It took several months to get a contract approved," says Molloy. "This reduced our credibility, discouraging some of the best vendors from even responding, which impacts the quality of services we provide."

Supporting 3,200 employees on all three islands was a challenge for Molloy and the small IT staff. "We spent a lot of time traveling around to visit desktops," says Mark Bough, Network Systems Administrator for the Government of the US Virgin Islands in St. Croix.

Complies with Federal Security Requirements

USVI paid close attention to the security features within Office 365 to ensure compliance with the Health Insurance Portability andAccountability Act (HIPAA) and the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA). "When I saw that Office 365 enabled us to be HIPAA compliant, I felt comfortable," says Molloy. "And we allayed the concerns of the US Virgin Islands Police Department regarding leaks and accidental disclosures of sensitive information. Our Office 365 environment enables us to set access control and distribution restrictions along with our cloud-based email service and to encrypt email messages."

Expedites Contract Approval

Instead of it taking six months to route papers through a contract approval process, today USVI expects the process to take approximately 10 days. "Minimizing the bureaucracy makes us look more efficient, which helps us win business with the best companies," says Molloy.

Improves Services to Grow Economy

The Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) processes approximately 14,000 business licenses annually, a government service with direct impact to the local economy. The faster licenses are issued, the faster local business can get to work. However, with manual processes, it was a challenge to ensure efficient license processing. "We're using Office 365 to make sure that people get their business licenses quickly, helping to generate a healthy economy for our island communities," says Horace Graham, Jr., Assistant Director of the Division of Licensing at the DLCA. "Now that we collaborate efficiently online with the Internal Revenue Bureau, we can issue a license in three days instead of it taking weeks. Renewals have gone from three weeks to a matter of hours."

The DLCA reduced the time required to notify officers in their Enforcement Division that an inspection is required. "Inspections used to take several weeks, now we are down to an average of five days. That's because we store licensing data on our intranet and the enforcement officers receive a notification when there's an inspection ready," says Wayne Biggs, Jr., Commissioner at the DLCA.

With Office 365 USVI has improved inter-office communication and reduced paper consumption to a significant degree. Instead of taking a printed form to the cashier, clients' payment information is electronically transmitted, showcasing the communication capabilities of Office 365. "Licensing officers send the payment information in an instant message to the cashier, and she clarifies any concerns in a quick chat," says Graham. "We've effectively reduced the license processing time by weeks."

Reduces Employee Downtime

Now that USVI uses Office 365, IT staff saves time by not having to manage disparate email solutions. Staffers can set up web conferences from their desktops instead of wasting time flying to inter-island offices. "Instead of waiting for a technician to fix my computer, Mark [Bough] used our web conferencing service to provide remote support and solved the issue in minutes," says Graham. "Before, it would have taken days to make an appointment and get it done. Now we can use that time to work more productively on government business that benefits our constituents."

Promotes Virtual Teamwork

DLCA staffers save hours of time writing reports that contain data from many contributors. Staffers use browser-based access to their files to access report drafts from anywhere they have Internet access. They can also simultaneously edit the document. "We're currently using Office 365 to store and collaborate on documents and spreadsheets for a project to update our licensing categories so that they align more closely to the North American Industry Classification System standard," says Graham. "With more efficient virtual teamwork, we can focus on serving our constituents. We see the future as very bright working with Office 365."

The Technologies Involved

USVI employees use many Office 365 services to work efficiently: Microsoft Exchange Online for email and calendaring services, Microsoft Skype for Business Online for web conferencing and instant messaging, and Microsoft SharePoint Online to automate workflows. Staffers sync documents between their devices with Office 365 ProPlus, and use Office Online to simultaneously edit drafts and work in virtual teams.

Microsoft Office 365
The new Office provides anywhere access to your familiar Office applications—plus email, calendar, videoconferencing, and your most current documents—on almost any device, from PCs to smartphones to tablets.

> " Today, using Office 365, the government works as a more efficient, professional, and customer-dedicated organization. "

—Reuben D. Molloy: Chief Information Technology Officer
Government of the US Virgin Islands