



IT Solution Provider Finds More Business Advantages with Microsoft Online Services

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Information technology

Customer Profile

Champion Solutions Group is based in Boca Raton, Florida, with 22 locations and 135 employees. The company offers IT services for customers throughout the eastern United States and the Ohio Valley.

Business Situation

Champion wanted to reduce capital expenses, ensure business continuity, and provide its people with communication and collaboration tools that would make their jobs easier and more efficient.

Solution

After evaluating Google Apps, Champion deployed the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite throughout all of its 22 locations.

Benefits

- Saved time and reduced costs
- Enhanced productivity
- Competitive advantage

“What concerned us most about Google was what we called their ‘roach motel’ approach to the cloud—once you go in, there’s no way out.”

Chris Pyle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Champion Solutions Group

For more than 30 years, Champion Solutions Group has helped its customers increase productivity, reduce costs, and improve application availability. The company wanted to reduce its own capital expenses, ensure business continuity, and develop a communications and collaboration environment that would help its employees be more efficient and effective. Champion saw the potential of cloud computing to free the company from high costs and help solve its customers’ business challenges. After evaluating hosted messaging and collaboration services including Google Apps, Champion deployed the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite throughout all its locations. Now the company has enhanced the productivity of its employees, reduced its capital and operational costs, and built a competitive advantage by transferring its experience with cloud computing to its customers.

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Situation

Champion Solutions Group designs and deploys virtualization, data management, business continuity, and other information technology (IT) solutions for customers in 11 states throughout the eastern United States and Ohio Valley. Based in Boca Raton, Florida, Champion manages 22 locations and employs 135 professionals who offer a full range of IT service, starting from discovery and system analysis all the way through design, implementation, and ongoing lifecycle support.

Chris Pyle, President and Chief Executive Officer of Champion Solutions Group, likes to remind people that his company doesn’t just offer IT solutions, however—Champion delivers solutions for fundamental business challenges. “We are in the business of helping our customers increase their productivity, reduce costs, and improve their application availability,” he says. “Everything we do through technology is intended to meet those three goals.”

In its own IT environment, Champion did not maintain any specific collaboration applications for managing and sharing documents, calendars, and workflows. People collaborated by sending email messages back and forth, and the company was paying U.S.\$3,000 a month for WebEx web conferencing from Cisco.

Champion wanted to make the best use possible of its most valuable resource: its people. It strives to supply its teams with advanced tools that make their jobs easier and more efficient, and Pyle wanted his technical staff to remain focused on delivering quality solutions to Champion’s customers, not spending their time managing the company’s internal messaging environment. “The talented people we had keeping our own email up and running were resources that we could

put to much better use someplace else,” says Pyle.

To make the most of its financial resources, Champion wanted to shift costs from large capital investments to more manageable operational expenses. For instance, because Champion is based in a hurricane zone in Florida, the company must incur the cost of duplicate messaging infrastructures: one is hosted at a company data center in Boca Raton, and the other at a second data center in Atlanta, Georgia. “If a hurricane strikes in Boca Raton, we’ve got 21 other locations that still need to manage 500 active customers in 11 states,” says Pyle.

Champion wanted a way to ensure its business continuity while reducing the capital costs of maintaining data centers at two different locations. “We thought we could build a smarter business continuity plan by managing our communication and collaboration resources differently,” says Pyle.

Pyle saw a way to free his team to innovate and contribute, and release his company from high capital costs, by hosting the Champion messaging infrastructure in the cloud—locating computing and data-storage resources in large data centers and making them available as services over the Internet. As a major competitor in its industry, Champion recognizes the potential of cloud computing to help solve its customers’ business challenges, and therefore wants to prepare for a future that includes a lot of cloud computing solutions.

“We want to be out in front of the important developments,” says Pyle. “When we recommend something to our customers, we want to be able to say we use it too.”

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Chris Pyle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Champion Solutions Group

Solution

Champion looked at offerings from several providers of hosted messaging services. Engineers at Champion evaluated Google Apps—hosted productivity services from Google—as well as the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, a collection of messaging and collaboration services hosted in Microsoft data centers and offered through Microsoft Online Services. Champion determined that the Microsoft offering had more depth and offered a clearer path toward future development.

“We didn’t feel that Google Apps was an enterprise-class solution compared to the robust package of capabilities in Microsoft Business Productivity Online,” says Pyle. “When we tried to find out what Google and other providers were planning three years out, we didn’t find any good answers, but Microsoft Online Services offers a strong roadmap into the future that we can use to deliver IT services in a new way.”

After successfully completing a 30-day pilot, Champion installed the complete Business Productivity Online Standard Suite throughout the company in January 2010, including Microsoft Exchange Online, Microsoft SharePoint Online, Microsoft Office Live Meeting, and Microsoft Office Communications Online. One of the things that Champion liked best about the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite was the flexibility of being able to choose between cloud-based and on-premises versions of the various components of the suite.

“What concerned us most about Google was what we called their ‘roach motel’ approach to the cloud—once you go in, there’s no way out,” says Pyle. “If we installed Google Apps and trained everybody in how to use it, and then for

some reason cloud computing wasn’t right for our business, we’d have nowhere to go; we’d have to start all over and retrain everybody. With the Microsoft solution, if we decided the cloud wasn’t meeting our changing needs, it would be easy to switch to on-premises versions of Microsoft Exchange Server or Microsoft SharePoint Server without having to retrain our whole staff.”

Champion manages its email messaging environment by using Exchange Online, without having to maintain duplicate messaging infrastructures. This option provides reliable global availability through the Internet, reduces capital expenses, and frees IT staff to work on more productive tasks. With SharePoint Online, Office Live Meeting, and Office Communications Online, all 135 Champion employees across 11 states now communicate and collaborate easily and efficiently, without having to rely on third-party solutions.

The company has developed 14 SharePoint Online portals, such as a marketing site where teams can develop and share resources for specific projects or campaigns, and a human resources site where employees can find applications and workflows for benefits, time off, or hiring processes. Employees can easily discover when a person they need is available, by using instant messaging features in Office Communications Online such as links to calendars and presence indicators that display whether contacts are available, busy, in a meeting, or away.

Champion has recently developed a team that is dedicated to creating cloud solutions for its customers based on Business Productivity Online. “Our mission is to increase productivity, reduce costs, and improve application availability for our customers,” says Pyle. “With the reliability,

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manageability, and flexibility of Microsoft Online Services, we can meet all three of those objectives.”

Benefits

By deploying the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, Champion has enhanced the productivity of its employees, reduced its capital expenses, and built a competitive advantage in its market by transferring its own experience with cloud computing to its customers. “By switching our communication and collaboration environment to the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, we’ve been able to reduce our costs, refocus employees to more productive areas, and gain peace of mind about service availability,” says Pyle. “Now we can show our customers how we can use Microsoft Online Services to help them get that done too.”

Saved Time and Reduced Costs

With Office Communications Online and Office Live Meeting, Champion has enhanced its instant messaging and web conferencing capabilities without having to spend an additional U.S.\$36,000 a year for WebEx web conferencing. And by managing its messaging environment with Exchange Online, Champion reduced the cost of maintaining a secondary data center in Atlanta. “We don’t need the disaster-recovery site to support our messaging and SharePoint environments anymore because those things are now always available up in the cloud,” says Pyle. “We got rid of six servers and we’re saving U.S.\$2,000 a month for data center space.”

The company has also reduced the management burden on its IT staff because it no longer has to manage an on-premises messaging infrastructure, and because many routine management processes are

automated with Exchange Online and SharePoint Online. For example, Champion IT staff does not have to spend time backing up email messages and document libraries, saving about U.S.\$700 a month.

“Before, I had resources working the equivalent of one half-time person on managing the messaging and collaboration servers,” says Pyle. “Now I can redirect those resources to more productive, strategic tasks that make us money.”

Enhanced Productivity

Champion employees are communicating more efficiently and effectively with features such as presence awareness in Office Communications Online and shared calendars in Exchange Online. “With the calendars linked to messaging, we can make our communication tremendously more productive,” says Pyle. “If somebody is trying to send me an instant message, the presence awareness automatically shows them if I’m in a meeting. They know not to disturb me, and they can easily find out when I will be available.”

According to Pyle, his employees are making Champion a more productive and effective company by using SharePoint Online to share resources and work together across business teams and locations. “We are using SharePoint Online to help us get 135 employees in 11 states to think with one mind and speak with one voice,” he says. “That’s a benefit that Google Apps could not come close to offering.”

Competitive Advantage

Champion’s experience with the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite has helped the company develop a competitive differentiator, open new markets, and attract new customers. In just a few months, Champion deployed solutions

For More Information

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www.microsoft.com

For more information about Champion Solutions Group products and services, visit the following websites:
www.championsg.com
www.championcloudservices.com

using Microsoft Online Services for 15 customers, and the company has more than 100,000 seats in its pipeline of customers who have completed cloud computing assessments.

"More people attend our marketing events for the Business Online Productivity Standard Suite than for any other solutions we offer. It's been the most widely accepted offering that we have introduced in a very long time," says Pyle. "Our customers want to decapitalize IT; they want a greener footprint; and they want to be more productive with the resources they have. All the reasons that I moved my business to the Business Online Productivity Standard Suite are the same reasons that we have 100,000 seats in our cloud computing pipeline."

Microsoft Online Services

Microsoft Online Services are business-class communication and collaboration solutions delivered as a subscription service and hosted by Microsoft. With these offerings, customers can cost-effectively access the most up-to-date technologies and immediately benefit from streamlined communications, simplified management, and business-class reliability and security features.

For more information, visit:
www.microsoft.com/online

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