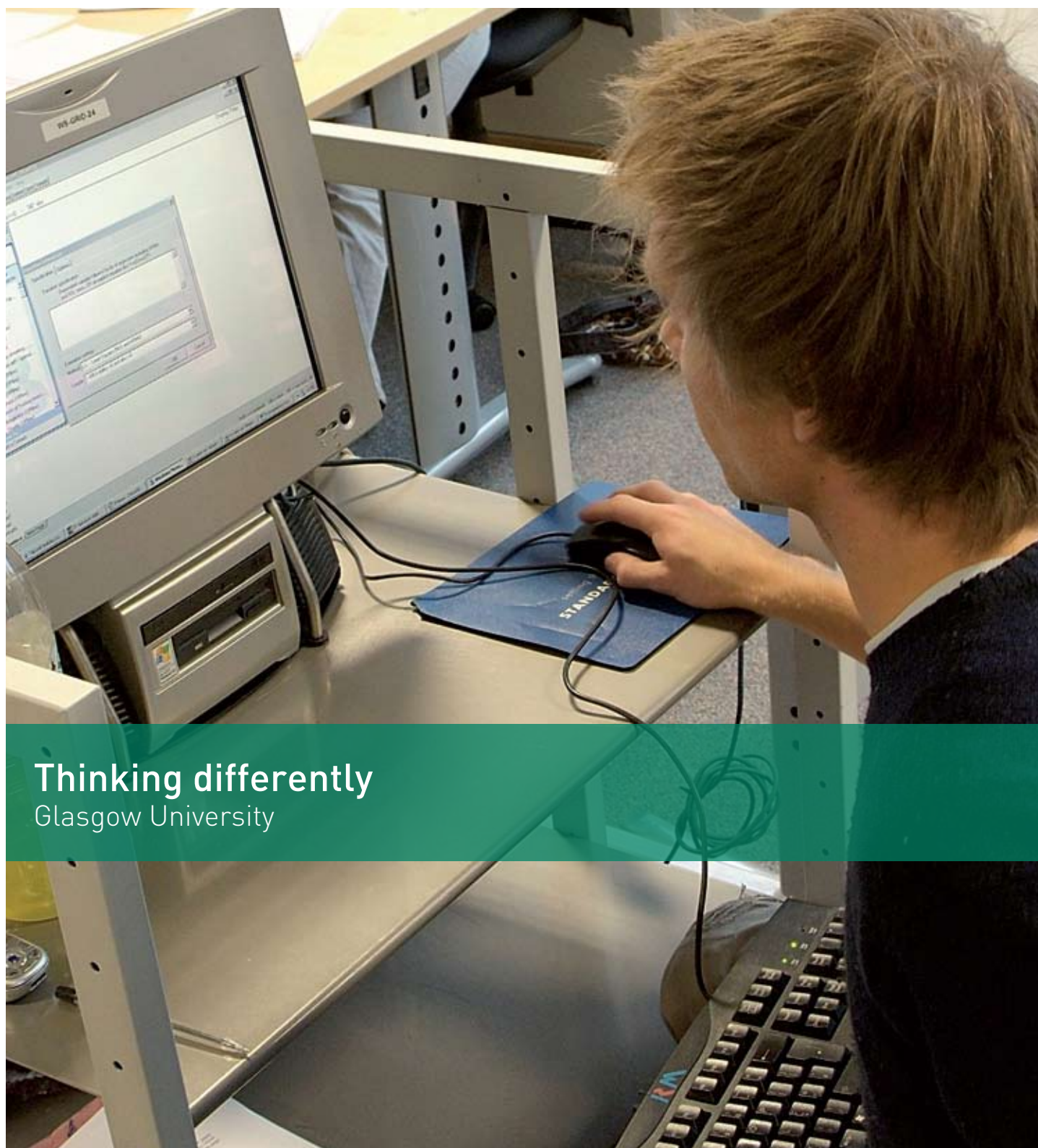


Outsourcing Email and Data Storage

Case studies



Thinking differently
Glasgow University

Introduction

Glasgow Caledonian University can be considered an early adopter and innovator in the outsourcing of student email and data storage having introduced the Hotmail service to students in the early months of 2006.

Glasgow Caledonian University is one of the largest universities in Scotland, offering a wide range of learning, research and knowledge transfer opportunities on a national and international basis. It is Scotland's fourth largest university in terms of student recruitment, with over 15,000 students. With a history dating back to 1875, Glasgow Caledonian was officially formed in 1993 with the merger of Glasgow Polytechnic and The Queen's College, Glasgow.

In the planning cycle for 2005/2006, the university acknowledged the need for a new email system for students largely driven by increases in the demand for memory, mobility and longevity of existing email accounts. The existing system, which had served the University well, did not have the capability demanded of it from the students. The question was, should the university provide student email in-house or should they outsource to a third party provider?

The decision that Glasgow Caledonian University made was to outsource the provision of their student email to Microsoft and give each student a Glasgow Caledonian branded Hotmail account.

Staff email was to remain an institutionally provided in-house service and was not part of the outsourcing procurement process.

Today Glasgow Caledonian are still outsourcing their student email to Microsoft. Though still basically Hotmail, it is now branded Windows Live Mail. The students do not use the Hotmail domain, but have a branded Glasgow Caledonian domain; this is different to the domain used by the university for their website and staff email.

Description of outsourced activity

In the summer of 2005 as part of the annual planning cycle, the university reviewed and evaluated their current student email provision. It was evident that the existing student email system was not going to meet the needs of current and future students and was originally designed at a time when few students had email or even internet connectivity.

Email was a core component for the university in communicating with the student, and to allow the student to communicate with the university. It was a critical system which needed to be robust and meet the changing needs of the students.

In 2005 students had an ever growing demand for disk space, fuelled by the use of digital photographs, digital video, online and digital resources and electronic submission of assignments.

Students were wanting to be able to access their email whilst mobile, using their mobile phones or other mobile internet devices. The newer smartphones which were coming onto the market allowed for media-rich content to be accessed at a time and place to suit the user. The existing email implementation was not suitable for mobile access.



The existing system only allowed students to use their email account for as long as they were a student at the university. Once they had finished their studies they would lose their email account and any files stored on their email server space. This often meant that students would not use their university email address but instead resort to using an external email account which would be accessible after they left the institution.

How long it took from start to full implementation

The whole process from the initial review to implementation of the email system for students took less than six months.

The existing email system for students was part of the annual planning process in 2005, and was reviewed in July of that year.

Over the next few months various options were considered, however though various free email offerings were available in the US, services at that time from Yahoo, AOL and Google were either still in beta (in the case of Google) or not available in the United Kingdom.

Microsoft's Hotmail was the only possible option available to Glasgow Caledonian at that time. Microsoft, who were already involved with some US Universities and providing their students with email, were keen for a pilot with a university in the United Kingdom.

Legal issues needed to be carefully considered to ensure that the university was not in breach of the Data Protection Act and that Safe Harbour principles were in place to reduce or eliminate the university's liability from possible misuse of the email by a student. Consulting with the university's legal team and checking contracts takes time.

Discussions with the student body and other stakeholders to explain the change with the student email were undertaken. There were some stakeholders in the University who were initially resistant to the concept of outsourcing the email. As a result various meetings were held to discuss and demonstrate why this particular road was being taken. Often these fears or reluctance were based on misapprehensions or an inaccurate perception. Once the strategic and business reasons behind the procurement were established and clarified, the reluctant stakeholders came on board. Some in the institution could not understand the motives behind Microsoft's free email, though after meetings explained that it was down to Microsoft wanting to gain market share and secure the future email service for the students, it started to make more sense.

Following various university committee meetings, the go ahead was given in December 2005. The system went live in January 2006 with selected groups of students, and this allowed internal and external processes and technical integration to be tested and checked. In August 2006, the system was rolled out for all students and has been running since then.

Strategic aim

The key aim of outsourcing the student email was to improve the student experience at the university, of which email was a core part in the support of the student's studies and communication.

Business case

The key business issue was in relation to the student experience. The question that was needing to be asked was less which email system should the university have for students, but more why do we need a student email system?

These were the two main questions that in the process of procuring the student email needed to be asked.

- What were the needs of the students in relation to email?
- What were the needs of the university in relation to the provision of student email?

There were other business drivers, cost savings for example. Though procuring a free service is not free of costs, they are significantly lower than providing the service itself. The cost of implementing the Hotmail service was less than 4% of the total cost of the University providing their own implementation. There would be further cost savings in the administration of the outsourced system as well.

Issues

One of the key issues for Glasgow Caledonian was whether the system would still be in place despite the figurehead behind the scheme having moved on. Would the system remain with the appointment of a new principal?

Many technical issues need to be considered. One of the main ones was the level of integration with other institutional systems. Glasgow Caledonian found that technically it was very simple and in many ways much simpler than implementing an in-house system.

Glasgow Caledonian's contractual and procurement processes were based on a traditional tendering model and as a result did not fit as expected when used for a free or non-cost service. Despite this, the existing tendering system was used.

One of the key concerns about using Microsoft Hotmail was the level of advertising. After discussions and meetings, Microsoft agreed to remove advertising whilst the student was at Glasgow Caledonian. Once the student had left the University, then Microsoft would introduce advertising into the Hotmail account in the same way that any other user who signed up for the account would have. Of course at this stage the student would be able to stop using the account and switch to another email service of their choice.



What are the main advantages to the institution in this outsourcing activity?

- An enhanced student experience in using email and communicating with the university
- A lower cost solution
- One of the key technical advantages is that much of the administration in running an email service for students is passed onto Microsoft and not done by the University

What are the main challenges to the institution in this outsourcing activity?

Established processes which do not fit the new free services now offered by companies such as Microsoft, Yahoo and Google.

Student experience

The benefits for the students were:

- A large online storage area; with a provision of 5GB per student, it was evident that the traditional 100MB or 500MB would be dwarfed by this larger amount. It would enable students to store many more emails and to also safely store large files online
- It was going to be more than email, the student would have an online calendar

- Their data was in the 'cloud', meaning that they could access their data whilst at university, at home, in the workplace, on the move, wherever there was a connection to the internet. The system was not constrained to the traditional personal computer, the student could access their email whilst mobile from a mobile internet device or a mobile phone
- Having left Glasgow Caledonian they would retain their email. In other words, email for life - or as long as they wanted to use it for

Lessons learned

Ensure that your contractual and procurement processes allow for the provision of a free service. They may be designed for a traditional system of tendering with providers bidding to provide the service, and may not cope with a bidding system based on a 'free' service.

Ensure that students and staff are aware of the reasons behind the change.

Contact details

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