

Speaking the same language



How collaboration tools are boosting productivity for aatranslations

Overview

Customer challenge

aatranslations had outgrown the ad hoc IT systems it was using. The company needed a cost-effective solution to cope with the growing demands of the business and enable its disparate freelance workforce to collaborate and work effectively.

Solution

IBM business partner FreshTL worked closely with aatranslations to implement the LotusLive™ solution, which has significantly increased productivity and can scale with the business.

Like most businesses, aatranslations had grown organically. Founded in 2000, the company started off small and gradually built up to its current situation with a customer base that's grown to several thousand businesses, a pool of approximately 1,000 freelance translators and offices in Spain, Germany, and the UK.

As a small business, aatranslations doesn't have too much time to concentrate on IT and didn't want to start employing IT staff, preferring to concentrate on the translation business. The company needed a system that was simple to use and could work with a freelance workforce that was widely spread. Its original choice of Microsoft Exchange Server and a selection of different cloud-based IT systems worked well when it was a small business, but as the company grew, its original ad hoc systems were starting to hinder it, rather than help.

Growing pains

One of the key problems with the system was the lack of version control. Files for translation were sent as attachments to emails, and if there were many files and multiple users accessing those files, it was easy to get confused over which was the most up-to-date version. Additionally, because the systems weren't designed for collaboration, it was impossible for users to share a file at the same time.

The company also had problems with the cloud tools it was using. Although the tools did their individual jobs well, they weren't integrated, meaning that freelancers, staff and customers had to jump from one tool to another. And, because the tools were all from different providers, users would need to jump from screen to screen and log in to each service individually.

Finding the right system

By early 2010, aatranslations had had enough of the old services and set about looking for a solution. Not only did the business want a long-term solution for its email, it wanted to remain free from having to manage any hardware by using something that was cloud-based. The company also wanted a system that wasn't siloed, so that freelancers didn't have to keep swapping between applications, and everything could be accessed from one screen.



Benefits

- Quick access to the most up-to-date version of a file, avoiding confusion and reducing wasted time
 - Multiple users able to collaborate on the same file at the same time, increasing efficiency
 - Significant cost savings, even as the business grows
 - The cloud-based tool is scalable and eliminates the need to manage hardware
 - The system was “intuitive” and no training was required
 - Access to files is secure and can be controlled.
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Crucially, the solution also had to be easy to use: because their systems were used by so many freelancers it was difficult to get users in for training. Lastly, aatranslations wanted a system that allowed free guest accounts for their users.

Sonja Kirschstein from aatranslations explains: “Because we have so many external users the solution had to be very intuitive, and we needed everything to be accessible under one roof. Additionally, there had to be a level of security in the systems so that only the right people get to see the files.”

After looking at the different requirements and doing extensive research, aatranslations shortlisted just three solutions: Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS); LotusLive and Google Apps. From the shortlist, aatranslations chose LotusLive and set up a trial on the LotusLive site. IBM then put aatranslations in touch with its business partner FreshTL.

FreshTL’s Tim Branton, product director, visited aatranslations. He looked at the problems the business was facing and its list of requirements before creating a solution. Branton split the work into two different strands. “The first piece was to find a decent email solution that would take the responsibility for running the email away from them, and to get a decent spam solution. The second part was to simplify what they were doing,” he says.

Making the switch

FreshTL identified the migration from Microsoft’s Exchange Server as the main issue that they needed to look at. “In the end, the actual migration was a pretty simple process,” says Branton. “IBM set up all the user accounts on LotusLive, and it was then just a case of switching the aatranslations domain name to point at the LotusLive servers rather than the old email server. After that it was just a simple process of importing their mail accounts and their contacts into LotusLive.”

The actual process of switching between the two packages was completed within a few days, after which FreshTL began working on integrating the other features of LotusLive. aatranslations had been keen to find a solution that was simple to use, and LotusLive did not disappoint. “The LotusLive solution is very intuitive and as result we didn’t need to do any training on the new system for any of our freelancers, customers, or for any of our internal staff,” says Kirschstein. “There was just a short introduction to the new services; we’re all used to using different applications and services, and it worked in a similar way so it wasn’t a big change at all.”

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Sonja Kirschstein, aatranslations

A new way of working

Both freelancers and business users have reported that the new system is quicker, and they don't have to deal with the different applications the old system forced them into. Internally, there are new tools that have made aatranslations employees' lives much easier. Kirschstein explains: “With LotusLive we can now set up projects or dedicated teams for certain customers and that makes things a lot easier for them, as they have all the files they need including background information on customers, jargon busters, glossaries that are always available. And it's always the right document they see.”

aatranslations is very pleased with the version control built into the system. With the old system it was easy to pick up and attach the wrong file when making amendments; with the new LotusLive solution this is now a thing of the past. Everyone now has access to the correct version of the file and more than one person can share a file at the same time.

Branton says one of the reasons they chose LotusLive was the ability to include version control at every level. “For example, you can set up a project within LotusLive and you can also link that project across to your contacts and link to your files – and you know that people who click on that link will always get the latest version of the file. Similarly, from your meeting area in LotusLive you can have links to files and contacts.”

A scalable solution

Lastly, aatranslations were keen to keep costs to a minimum. “The money we now pay for the whole LotusLive system is equivalent to the money we used to spend on just the Exchange email component of our old solution,” says Kirschstein. “All the costs for extras like GoToMeeting are removed, along with all of the costs for the server maintenance. It's a fixed cost that we can calculate, and with the guest accounts we can potentially have thousands more users and it won't cost any more.”

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Sonja Kirschstein, aatranslations





aatranslations is happy with LotusLive but the integration process isn't over. One of the new features that FreshTL is integrating is the Vondle Live Viewer, a third-party plug-in. The Vondle Live system allows users to view and make comments on a selection of more than 70 file types without the user needing to have a copy of the original application. So a translator could in theory view a CAD document without having expensive CAD software installed on their computer.

Additionally, Vondle can also help with version control, as Branton explains: "Customers often need to review the final copy. With Vondle Live you can get them to view and annotate the document through the browser, without ever changing the original document. If you try and do that through email it becomes a really time consuming process. You also tend to get comments and requests for changes made out of context. There's nothing like seeing a request for a change within the context of a document so you can see exactly what the person reviewing the document wants you to do."

▶ aatranslations

aatranslations is a web-based translation agency, providing translation services, website localisation, copy-writing and copy-editing, with offices in Spain, Germany and the UK. Founded in 2000, the company serves more than 2,000 customers in more than 20 countries, with a team of approximately 1,000 professional translators covering almost every language combination.

aatranslations specialises in cutting-edge translation solutions and has had an impressive annual growth rate of more than 30% every year for the past five years.

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