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## A personal testimonial: outsourcing e-mail

*By Linda Musthaler*

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Every now and then, my company tries something new that pleases us so much that we just have to sing its praises. Our most recent epiphany comes in the form of outsourced e-mail. It's one of those things that is making us ask ourselves, "Why didn't we do this a long time ago?"

My company had been using Microsoft Exchange Server for several years. We've always had the nagging feeling that Exchange was too complicated a system for a small company to maintain. You see, we don't have an internal IT staff dedicated to the care and feeding of an Exchange system. Instead, our technical consultants worked on it when necessary. The problem was, "when necessary" was turning into a full-time job, especially during the past year or two when there was an endless stream of patches to apply, as well as anti-spam and anti-virus software to install and maintain. It seems like, for one reason or another, we were restarting Exchange far too often; it was not a "set it and forget it" type of application.

Then the server simply crashed, and we were down for days. In today's business climate, being off e-mail for even a few hours can be devastating. Our company's owner went shopping for a better solution, and she found utopia. Utopia Systems, that is.

Utopia Systems is an application service provider (ASP) from Delaware that offers outsourced messaging, database and Internet hosting solutions. The company specializes in applications centered on Microsoft technology and architecture, including Exchange Server, SQL Server, Mobile Information Server and others.

We called Utopia Systems and got our company up and running on Exchange in just a few hours. We have every function we could want from an e-mail system, including Web access and mobile access to our

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mailboxes. We have folders, calendars, shared and private address books, reminders, contacts - and all of this costs only a few dollars per user per month. Oh, and we were able to carry forward all our old folders and files from our previous in-house e-mail system, so little has been lost.

Best of all, we no longer need to devote any of our own resources to caring for our e-mail system. We have no worries about disk space, backups, server configuration, the latest virus, or planning for an upgrade. That's all Utopia Systems' headache now.

While we've only used this application for a few weeks, we've been very pleased with the performance to date. According to the service level agreement, if the system is not available 99.5% of the time, the ASP will reduce its fees and not hand us excuses. So far, the service has always been available - more so than when we maintained our own Exchange Server.

Outsourcing a key application like e-mail isn't for every company, but it certainly is worth a look for small to midsized businesses. As applications such as e-mail get more complex to maintain, it becomes more costly to employ your own technical experts in-house. We've found real peace of mind through letting outside experts take care of the system while we get back to doing our real jobs.

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