

OPTIMISING GROUP CHAT

IF CHAT'S NOT YOUR LOT, MAYBE YOU SHOULD RECONSIDER, ADVISES FORMICARY'S HOWARD TRAVERS

With migration to new platforms such as Microsoft Office Communications Server (OCS) driving its adoption, persistent group chat is no longer the preserve of large investment banks. Combining the immediacy of instant messaging (IM) with the multi-party outreach offered by e-mail, persistent group chat can bring huge value to an organisation and its employees both in terms of efficiencies, improved communication and greater cohesion all round. As a result of this, more individuals are starting to experiment with it – with varying degrees of success. While the technology is an extremely powerful application, most don't realise its full potential. The following simple steps give a flavour of how to optimise group chat for added impact, beyond just basic IM.

CREATE A STANDARD USE POLICY AND SENIOR SPONSORSHIP

Many organisations and individuals are just starting to use persistent group chat. But to ensure that it is being used to best advantage, and in a controlled and compliant manner, it is worth creating a persistent group chat policy. It is also important that there is senior management buy-in and these people take an active part in group chat to endorse the technology and its perception as an approved communication tool.

CREATE GREATER OPENNESS

While group chat facilitates two-way dialogue, large open chat rooms can become uncontrolled if inappropriate messages are posted. Group chat solutions such as Formicary's Executive Chat provide the opportunity for senior management and employees to discuss topics in a controlled environment. Users can privately post their questions to the executive team who can then decide which ones they want to answer. When they respond, both the question and answer is added to the chat room for all to see.

KEEP ON MOVING

Information has a limited time value. Receiving updates after everyone else makes it old news and essentially worthless. However, just because someone has left the office needn't mean that the communication flow should cease. Solutions such as Formicary Mobile Chat allow users to remain fully connected with their teams on group chat to share and access information in a timely and efficient manner whilst on the move or working remotely.

INCLUSION FOR ALL

Discussions don't always solely revolve around those within the company. Often, third party partners, suppliers or customers should also have

a say. Being able to extend group chat discussions through a Web-based real-time reach chat client such as Formicary WebChat to these valued external contacts can ensure that everyone is on the same page at the same time. WebChat can also be embedded into any portal, including SharePoint.

KEEP COMPLIANT

Just as persistent group chat opens up how people and groups communicate with each other, there will still be corporate or legal reasons why certain participants should not communicate with each other – known as Chinese or Ethical Walls. For example, regulatory requirements frequently state that an investment organisation broker is prohibited from communicating in any way to market researchers, as they may have confidential information that might influence an investment decision. As such, organisations should consider implementing a mechanism, such as Formicary Ethical Walls, to prevent the communication of parties via OCS.

GET GLOBAL

Large organisations rarely have all of their employees in one building, let alone one country. Persistent group chat can break down geographic borders and integrate teams from around the world to share anything from best practice to critical information updates in a timely and efficient manner.

CHAT'S NOT ALL

Group chat is all about knowledge sharing. By default, chats contain a wealth of expertise and interests that may not be formally captured by traditional methods. Chat discussions are increasingly being used to source industry experts on a given subject, or review how a similar problem may have been solved previously. But group chat needn't focus purely on solving work issues. By its very nature, it brings like-minded people together to discuss a common subject, which will help create and strengthen working relationships.

Of course, there will always be doubters who view group chat as an unnecessary distraction. But then again people had reservations about e-mail, which has gone on to become an essential business tool. We're already seeing signs that group chat is set to follow suit and if organisations are smart about how they use it, the impact could be just as big as e-mail, if not bigger. **F**

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A SOLID DECISION

STEVE HALL DISCUSSES THE PROS AND CONS OF SWITCHING FROM HARD DISKS TO SOLID-STATE DRIVES AND OFFERS SOME ADVICE ON WHAT TO CHOOSE

Although solid-state drives (SSDs) have a pretty long history, it's only in the last couple of years that they have started to be used on a large scale in personal computers. This is as a result of the technology coming down in price to a point where it's a reasonable option for many corporates.

When the technology press covers the SSD versus hard disk debate, it's usually framed exclusively in terms of price – the cost per gigabyte of storage. While cost is certainly a key factor in any business decision, to think purely in terms of price ignores the real performance advantages of SSDs. It's like comparing a BMW to a Skoda and saying the latter is a better car just because it's cheaper.

The real reasons for considering a switch to Kingston SSDNow are about reliability and performance – if you like, performance per gigabyte. Because they have no moving parts, and because the chips they use to store data are shock-proof, SSDs are more reliable than hard disks. But they are also a higher-performing product: if you put SSDs into a computer, the time the machine takes to start up and shut down will be cut significantly. There's also an impact on battery life for laptop computers. SSDs use less power, so a battery that might previously have two hours of life will last longer. And if the machine is taking less time to start and shut down, you can get more done in the time available anyway.

For businesses that have switched to Windows 7, or are thinking about it, there are even better reasons to move over to SSDs. Previous generations of Windows treated all drives the same, and thus the machines couldn't extract the potential performance benefits from SSDs. Windows 7, by contrast, partitions the drives more efficiently, cutting down on redundant cycles, and includes the TRIM feature, which allows the computer to delete garbage data in advance and increase the drive's lifetime.

The relative fragility of hard drives reflects their original design intent. They were conceived as a device to be used in climate-controlled server rooms, and thus have become the most likely part of a computer to fail. For users, drive failure can be disastrous. If your computer breaks down but you can save your information, you can be up and running again relatively quickly. If you lose your data though, you are in much more trouble. Our free KingstonCare service, which covers advance replacements and onsite care, has now been extended to include our SSD products as well as memory.

Until now, most manufacturers of SSDs have seen them as a high-end product. At Kingston, we think they are the future of storage, especially for those regularly on the move. But for mass uptake

to happen, there has to be an obvious return on investment and customers need to be comfortable with the solution they are buying. So when we sell our memory, customers know us and they are confident. We are also the only manufacturer to sell drives separately or as an upgrade bundle. Suppose a customer has Windows 7, and, knowing it works well with SSD, wants a new drive. Our upgrade kits take an hour at most to install (as a technical user, I personally have done it in half an hour).

In the financial services sector, there are several obvious opportunities for a switch to SSDs to improve performance. For heavy number crunching applications, the greater performance of Kingston SSDNow is ideal – our Kingston SSDNow V Series and Kingston SSDNow Intel M Series drives offer very high input/output operations per second and can make such applications run noticeably faster. Elsewhere in the sector, some leading brokerage companies are looking at SSDs because of their need for high uptime. If split-second dealing is your business, then you will typically buy high-end memory and screens, because high availability is key to your success. It's the same with SSDs: they may be more expensive upfront but their reduced risk of downtime could be the difference between doing an important deal and missing it. **F**

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