



Mississippi's NMRC Tames Email Platform With Email CONTROL! for Exchange (ECX)

The State of Mississippi's Department of Mental Health operates five regional centers where it coordinates the provision of services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Email unites a team of caseworkers, therapists and administrators at 18 remote facilities of the North Mississippi Regional Center (NMRC). Sharing confidential client information via email is essential to the daily workflow, and far more effective than phone-tag or paper messages that were the standard just a few years ago.

The NMRC's rapid adoption of email has resulted in a quadrupling of the user count over the past 18 months – and the number of requests for email accounts keeps growing. When the Microsoft Exchange 2003-based system gives even a hint of being slow, harried users call the NMRC's one email-savvy IT staffer asking him to instantly fix the problem. This same person also handles every system admin task for all 23 counties. Finding the extra time needed to handle these email 'help' calls was getting near impossible as email use expanded.

"There's no way I could ever see how Exchange is performing at a glance with the tools provided in the base platform. The sophistication of the reports and alerts in the new ECX software is great. They give me the metrics to know where our email usage has been, and where it's going."

BRANDON MCHENRY, SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR,
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI NMRC

"Things can get hectic around here, so I knew I needed to automate email management, or it would quickly stack up on me," said Brandon McHenry, systems administrator for the NMRC. That's because Exchange provides no features that give administrators a top-down view of how the email network is performing. While SNMP and Microsoft Office Manager (MOM) examine server-based statistics such as utilization rates, they do not provide email usage metrics nor provide health and performance metrics that reflect the end-users' experience.

NMRC needed help generating monthly and weekly email reports for management and needed to better understand how fast email use was growing so the organization could plan when to add its next server. Only ECX provides this kind of detail.

UNDERSTAND EMAIL - FAST

In April 2006 McHenry began evaluating email management solutions. ECX (Email CONTROL! for Exchange) software instantly fit the bill. Within a week of purchasing the software, McHenry was conversant in its use, gaining newfound knowledge of his email network and ability to assess how his users are using email over time. He immediately started saving time by more quickly addressing user help calls – even proactively addressing issues before users complained. He can also now provide weekly reports to his management team.

ECX provides both real-time and historical information on Exchange messaging traffic. ECX also includes a unique module that sends probe messages to measure end-to-end message delivery times – an early indicator of potential trouble spots. The software does not require the installation of agents or other software on the Exchange server.

In his first few days of working with ECX, he got the typical user phone calls asking "Did my email get to where I sent it?" This time, instead of mining log files stored deep within the server for 3 to 5 minutes, then calling the user back, McHenry simply clicked on a few icons and answered the question while the user remained on the phone.

"There's no way I could ever see how Exchange is performing with the bundled tools. The sophistication of the reports and alerts in ECX software is great." NMRC also has taken advantage of ECX's facilities for email audit trails when questions of appropriate employee use of the network have arisen. Now being able to track emails, McHenry can see if someone sent confidential information to unsecured internal or external email addresses.

A rich set of ECX graphical analysis features and reporting templates let NMRC automatically create reports weekly and monthly on total email volumes, bandwidth utilization, and email growth – reports that McHenry now presents to his management team. When quarterly or annual budgets need to be reviewed, ECX provides charts and graphs illustrating trends in email volumes and demonstrates that email service levels have met service level agreements (SLAs).

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ECX provides reports that help balance email server loads, confirm server status, and clean up inactive mailboxes. In a small organization with limited IT resources, every asset has to be put to productive use, including email inboxes. ECX help keep tabs on email mailbox sizes and activity – so McHenry can set or revise email policies on mailbox storage limits and sender/recipient settings. He now ensures appropriate and reasoned system use.

VIEW EXCHANGE'S EMAIL NETWORK AT A GLANCE

The software provides a graphical at-a-glance view of the network that is particularly helpful to busy IT staffers. The ECX Health Track feature graphically shows the NMRC Exchange network, with green connections between servers showing email flow within tolerance and displaying red lines where it is not. If the unexpected occurs – for example, a technician disconnects a network cable – ECX highlights the broken route so IT can repair the line even before the end user knows it's down.

McHenry says HealthTrack's automation helps his small IT shop keep up with its ever-increasing responsibilities as his user population grows. "With HealthTrack I know if I have a break in my service and where the break is," he said. "If a segment is down, I see a dotted red line and I know where my problem is. I can pinpoint exactly where the problem is, and bring everything back online that much more quickly."

"The faster I can see trouble, the faster I can fix it," he said.

MANAGING THE ESSENTIAL EXCHANGE NETWORK

"Because of the nature of the data we handle – confidential records about clients – our messaging environment is becoming a critical component of the services we provide for citizens with disabilities in the northern part of our state," McHenry said.

"ECX gives me the metrics to know where our email usage has been, and where it's going, so I can get a grip on our exponential email growth. Having this at a glance view of our Exchange network really makes you breathe easier as an IT professional."



ABOUT PERMESSA

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