

INTERNATIONAL FOOD RETAILER TAKES A FRESH APPROACH TO EMAIL WITH GOOGLE AND CSC



CLIENT: Ahold, a leading international food retailer

CHALLENGE: Replace an end-of-life email system for 50,000 users across Europe and the US.

SOLUTION: Migration, under CSC project management, to Google Apps for Business; utilising CSC experience with large enterprise migrations and expertise in change management, user training and Google security services.

RESULTS: The easiest migration Ahold had ever experienced and completely satisfied users. Ahold also now has a complete collaboration platform that the business is eager to make use of.



One fine June day, 25 CSC-trained IT helpdesk staff geared themselves up to take calls from employees at 750 Netherlands stores owned by international food retailer Ahold. Some 14,000 Ahold store employees were being migrated from their traditional enterprise email system to Gmail on the Google Apps platform. Ahold knew that technology migrations always had an initial period of pain as glitches were discovered and users learned the new system. They didn't expect what happened next.

THE EASIEST MIGRATION WE'VE EVER HAD

In the first hour there were just two calls. The support team started calling the stores but were told: "It's all fine, it's a great system, thank you." By the end of the day they'd taken 25 calls, fewer than they would typically take about email on an average day with the old system.

It's a pattern that was repeated for each phase of Ahold's Google rollout to some 50,000 staff globally. Calls to the support team tend to be more about exploring the functionality of the Google Apps platform than about technical problems.

"From a technical perspective, this was the easiest migration I've ever seen," says Christine Atkins, Ahold's senior vice president for Group IT. "And in terms of acceptance, we've never had such happy users. They just wondered why we hadn't done it years before."

Ahold's global migration partner, providing overall project, change management and deployment support, was CSC.

"We were really lucky to find CSC," says Ronald Looman, senior director for Group IT at Ahold. Ahold looked at a number of potential partners but only CSC had the experience of managing a Google rollout of this scale, having successfully completed a migration for 15,000 employees of the City of Los Angeles.

"As early enterprise adopters of the platform," says Looman, "we really wanted the confidence that CSC's experience gave us. And they certainly delivered for us."

THE DECISION TO GO GOOGLE

Ahold's email migration project arose when its legacy email system was coming to the end of its supported life; the company needed to upgrade or move to a new system. Ahold started exploring a cloud solution because it would enable them to focus on change management rather than technology, because it simplified access for its highly distributed workforce, and because of its usage-based cost model and easy scalability.

At the time, Google had no enterprise customers of Ahold's scale. Ahold has more than 200,000 employees and almost 3,000 retail stores across 11 European countries and 27 US states; its brands include Albert Heijn and Etos in the Netherlands; ICA in the Nordics; Albert/Hypernova in the Czech Republic; Giant and Stop & Shop in the US; and Peapod, the largest online grocery service in the US.

"Originally we didn't even consider Google as an option because we thought of them as a consumer brand," says Atkins. "But when we did talk to them, they had the right answers for our requirements. They took on each of our concerns and provided the detail and background we needed to overcome any issues we had about cloud-based email."

Ahold's security people grilled Google's and were reassured by their world-class credentials and approaches. And because it's an on-demand system, Ahold could instantly create a pilot and let its IT team explore the service for several months.

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A FRESH APPROACH TO EMAIL



The company was also satisfied that it would be able to integrate Google Apps with its own identity management system and automated user account provisioning processes.

THE CULTURAL CHANGE: CHALLENGING BUT WORTH IT

It's not unusual for technology migration projects in large multinationals to get caught up in the minutiae of technical considerations for different parts of the business — none of which really add business value. But because Google is genuinely a standard, multi-tenant cloud environment, the service provider could handle everything.

"There was very little to discuss from a technical point of view," says Atkins. "This allowed us to focus on the cultural change. We needed a big shift in mindset for everyone, from our executives to our legal and internal audit teams, and also IT.

Atkins explains why Ahold took the plunge: "All of the things we loved — the removal of technical complications, the price, the scalability, the reality of continual improvement and innovation — were possible because it was a standardised cloud service. So we had to accept that we wouldn't be able to dictate special terms. It wasn't an easy change but it was worth it, especially for a commodity service like email."

A SAFE PAIR OF HANDS

Once the contract with Google was signed, migration took place in stages under CSC's project management, supported by

a global CSC team. Ahold's 50,000 email users in Europe and the US were migrated in 14 rollout phases, timed to fit in with the priorities of the local organisations.

CSC's experience came to the fore, not just for project and change management but in ensuring the security of the solution through prior experience with the Google Postini security service, and in the provision of knowledge, training and support before and during each 'go live' day.

"Without CSC we would have been starting from scratch for everything," says Looman. "Instead, we could take advantage of their established processes, existing user communication materials, their training expertise, and their experience with security configurations."

For Ahold, the Google project was not just a success in itself — on time, on budget, and with a satisfied user base — but it was also an ideal first foray into cloud-based delivery of IT and what it means for the business. Although the business case was based on an email requirement, the Google Apps platform is about much more than email. It opens up a number of potential avenues for improving communication and collaboration, which Ahold is already exploring.

"All sorts of things become possible now," says Atkins. "Those already using email can use videochat or share documents. Or we could conceivably roll out email to employees who traditionally haven't had it because it was too expensive. Who knows — we've only just started to scratch the surface of what is now possible."

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**Christine Atkins,
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