

Mountain Medical Physician Specialists

PROFILE



Industry

Healthcare

Corporate Headquarters

Murray, Utah

Employees

225+

Annual Revenue

Privately held company

Website

<http://www.mtnmedical.com/>

THE NUMBERS

- 300+ VMware Zimbra licenses
- One-third cost of Microsoft Exchange enterprise version; close to half as costly as slimmed-down Exchange

IN BRIEF

Objective

Replace end-of-life GroupWise email system with cost-efficient solution for fast and easy calendaring, email, email tracking and task management.

Solution

Complement server virtualization with VMware Zimbra.

Business Impact

- Increase productivity of end users including doctors, aestheticians and administrative staff.
- Ensure information security.
- Simplify IT management.
- Scale easily to accommodate practice growth.
- Minimize TCO

Physician Practice Embraces VMware Zimbra, Virtualization to Cut Costs, Raise Productivity, Support Growth

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— Kerry Cox, CIO, Mountain Medical Physician Specialists

The U.S. healthcare system is in crisis? Not at Mountain Medical Physician Specialists. Utah's largest radiology and vascular-surgery practice is profitable, growing and proud of its record of excellent patient care.

Four years ago, Mountain Medical set out to modernize its management and technology strategies. One priority area was an aging IT infrastructure. The practice was using legacy workstations configured as servers. The email system was a version of Novell GroupWise about to lose vendor support. Yet nobody wished to move to a newer version of GroupWise; they wanted a solution with robust, up-to-date email and collaboration features.

Mountain Medical repurposed the workstations and virtualized a smaller number of servers with VMware® vSphere®. It replaced the email system with VMware Zimbra® Collaboration Server (ZCS). The marriage of VMware virtualization and VMware Zimbra, says Mountain Medical CIO Kerry Cox, creates an infrastructure powerhouse for cost-efficient productivity.

"Zimbra did a demo online, and after the first five minutes the doctors and board members all said, 'We're done, we're sold on it—move forward,'" recalls Cox, who joined Mountain Medical as CIO in 2009. "VMware is the leading force in virtualization, and the Zimbra collaboration system is head and shoulders above the rest. End users love the ease of use. IT is freed up by its management simplicity. And Zimbra costs much less than competing solutions."

Practice Searches for a Mobile, Scalable, Cost-Efficient Solution

Mountain Medical employs approximately 225 radiologists, vascular surgeons, other doctors, aestheticians and support staff, including five IT specialists. Headquartered in Murray, Utah, the practice includes an imaging center, a vein center and a vascular surgery practice, each with two locations. Mountain Medical doctors also travel to roughly a dozen Utah hospitals and clinics; therefore, mobile and Web access are must-haves.

Everyone knew the old email system had to go. Common complaints are that GroupWise lacks a robust Web client, does not widely support openness and extensibility, and tends to be slow and costly to administer.

"GroupWise just hadn't kept up with the times and the technology," Cox says.

What should replace it? Solution priorities were reliability, speed, productivity features, security and affordability. End users wanted fast and easy calendaring, email, email archiving and task management.

One option they considered was Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Exchange. Cox, who was familiar with Zimbra from its success for previous employer, priced and presented three options: an enterprise version of Microsoft Exchange; a slimmed-down version of Microsoft Exchange; and VMware Zimbra. He factored in purchase price, hardware, software, licenses and maintenance. The Microsoft Exchange enterprise version weighed in at three times the cost of VMware Zimbra. Even the slimmed-down version of Microsoft Exchange cost nearly twice as much, and it would have lacked important and desirable security features. VMware Zimbra won hands down on both cost and features.

“It’s the next step of evolution,” Cox says. “You move off of Exchange, you move to a more stable and robust product. That is Zimbra.”

The Mountain Medical doctors compared VMware Zimbra side-by-side with Microsoft Outlook and preferred the end-user experience they’d get with VMware Zimbra—all the Outlook functionality they wanted, a user-friendly interface and enriched productivity features such as integration with third-party data sources.

The practice also saw the IT advantages of a platform-agnostic, open-source solution that avoided vendor lock-in, and that was stable, scalable and simpler to administer.

What’s more, everyone appreciated that VMware Zimbra was a fraction of the cost.

VMware Technology Underlies Virtualized Infrastructure

To see how VMware Zimbra fits into Mountain Medical’s IT environment, take a peek at the company’s back-end infrastructure. The virtualization platform is VMware vSphere. The myriad workstations have given way to HP ProLiant Servers. Storage is Compellent SAN. Mountain Medical maintains three server rooms. One in the Murray business office houses data and monitoring systems. The Imaging Center server rooms in Murray and Ogden host the picture archiving and communication system (PACS).

“In 2009 we virtualized and slimmed down from a crowded server room,” Cox says. “Now we have four rack-mount units handling about 20 systems. Our VMware infrastructure is evolving. We’re moving toward fully redundant ESX machines with a SAN in the background so we can move the images around, reallocate them as needed and do backup images. Eventually, we will add VMware vCenter to manage all of the virtual machines.”

The VMware Zimbra deployment is virtual and locked down for security purposes to put all Web interfaces on a separate server. Protection of patient confidentiality is critical in healthcare and is mandated by law.

“We virtualized the entire Zimbra system and replicated that virtual install in two other locations, so we have three different instances of Zimbra,” Cox says. “Only one of them is our main Web interface. Everyone who works in billing or collections sits on a separate Zimbra instance.”

For security purposes, Mountain Medical also has users log in to VMware Zimbra through the SSL protocol or secure HTTP. “We did not want any users sitting down at a café, logging into the Web interface and having somebody sniff out their username and passwords,” Cox says.

VMware Zimbra Solution Delivers Extreme Productivity

VMware ZCS is rich with features such as email, contacts, calendar, documents, file sharing, tasks and social media. VMware Zimbra also offers a vast array of Zimlets. These are mechanisms for integrating VMware ZCS with third-party information; mouse over an address, for example, and a map pops up. Or a Zimlet could “mash up” —intermix—information within VMware Zimbra itself; mouse over a name and see the associated contact information.

In a healthcare setting, Zimlets could interface with drug-information systems, electronic medical records and other similar applications. Mountain Medical sees these extensions as very important to the future of their deployment.

To ease the transition, the IT team conducted group and one-on-one orientations to VMware Zimbra. Users can also connect to VMware Zimbra through the VMware Zimbra Connector for Microsoft Outlook. This preserves the look and feel of the familiar Outlook interface while providing real-time two-way synchronization of mail, contacts and calendar. However, most Mountain Medical end users use the browser-based AJAX interface for VMware Zimbra, which delivers application features such as drag-and-drop, tagging and conversation views.

“A lot of people are very impressed with the AJAX look and feel, where they can click and drag the different emails into different files,” Cox says.

In addition to ease of use and rich functionality, speed is another great VMware Zimbra advantage. The old GroupWise system sometimes took several minutes to make emails available to end users, Cox says. Now it takes seconds.

Doctors on the road can check their email messages and calendars via cell phone thanks to VMware Zimbra Mobile. Staying connected without being tethered to a desktop client is critical. “All the doctors work not only at our offices but at five or six different hospitals,” Cox says. “They need to be available. The first thing we did was enable mobility.”

Mountain Medical archives communications after 30 days, using VMware Zimbra Archiving and Discovery. The tool provides fast access to stored files and, for many organizations, simplifies compliance with requirements such as HIPAA.

Management Simplicity Frees IT Staff Time

While Mountain Medical end users benefit from the ease-of-use and productivity features of VMware Zimbra, the IT staff appreciates the solution’s management simplicity. The practice early on hired a consultant to assist with the migration to VMware Zimbra but soon found it no longer needed help.

“He showed us the basic steps and within a couple of hours, we thought, ‘This is really easy.’ That’s how intuitive it is,” Cox says.

Cox says it takes just one staff person to manage the VMware Zimbra environment, whereas it would have taken two or three to manage Microsoft Exchange. “We hardly have to touch it,” he says. “It takes care of itself, and is easily scalable.”

Cox is an avid proponent of the VMware Zimbra open-source model. “We try not to funnel money into proprietary technology unless there’s a compelling reason to,” he says. “We used open source in the back end but, at least for now, kept the front end the proprietary Microsoft GUI that everyone’s familiar and comfortable with.”

“Zimbra did a demo online, and after the first five minutes the doctors said, ‘This is good. We’re done. Let’s move forward.’”

Kerry Cox CIO
Mountain Medical Physician Specialists

Word Spreads in Healthcare Community

Next steps for Mountain Medical will be an upgrade to VMware ZCS 7, which delivers hundreds of new features, including a calendar-scheduling wizard, anywhere reminders and self-recovery of deleted mail or event data.

Word about VMware Zimbra is spreading throughout the healthcare community, Cox says. In a recent meeting with colleagues, he learned of a practice in Arizona that is thinking about moving hundreds of mailboxes to VMware Zimbra. “I think a lot of people will want to move to Zimbra when they understand the features sets, simplicity and cost savings,” Cox says.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

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<p>Table Subhead:</p> <p>VMware Zimbra Collaboration Server (ZCS)</p> <p>VMware vSphere 4.1</p> <p>VMware ESX</p> <p>VMware ESXi</p>	<p>Applications:</p> <p>Email</p> <p>AMICAS PACS</p>	<p>Platform:</p> <p>HHP ProLiant Servers</p> <p>Compellent SAN</p> <p>Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5.5</p>

