



Developer mobilises real-time collaboration tools in Google Apps for Business to spur innovation and productivity



At a Glance

What they wanted to do:

- Collaborate in real-time, internally and with customers
- Reduce IT complexity
- Work on any device with a browser
- Promote employee productivity
- Take advantage of new innovations from Google

What they did:

- Mobilised Gmail, Google Docs, Google Calendar, and Google Sites

What they accomplished:

- Enabled real-time collaboration
- Updated customers continuously, resulting in faster payment
- Drove innovation and productivity
- Focused on value-added IT activities
- Enabled users to work when, where, and how they need
- Improved company processes
- Maximised opportunities to move into the cloud

Business

Vakil Housing Development Corporation is a family-owned business founded in 1995, specialising in building affordable residential properties such as villas. Run by a father and two sons, the company has 130 employees working from a corporate office in Bangalore and a project office in Hosur, India. The company also maintains offices at its project sites.

Challenge

When Vakil Housing began its first large-scale project building 300 villas in Hosur, the company needed to keep customers informed of the progress of their construction projects every step of the way. Customers make payments when Vakil Housing reaches certain stages in the construction process. The payments, in turn, fund further construction.

Keeping customers informed was especially challenging because customers are typically located all over the world. "During the Hosur project, customers could not visit the project site frequently to check on progress. If they were not convinced of the status and if we did not update them regularly, customers would not make payments toward different milestones," explains Mohammed Ali Vakil, Director for Vakil Housing.

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—Mohammed Ali Vakil, Director, Vakil Housing Development Corporation

Internally, the company faced the issue of keeping different departments informed of progress. Customer care, for instance, needed to know the status of construction so they could follow up on pending payments. The company had been using a combination of a hosted ERP package and an on-premise email solution for internal collaboration. There were constant delays and confusion in keeping all the departments updated with the latest information because employees were emailing spreadsheets and documents back and forth. Adding to the challenge, maintenance of on-site servers for email and issues with inbox quotas put a strain on the company's two-person IT staff.

"We needed real-time collaboration tools to reduce the time it took for information to flow between individuals and teams – and we had to reduce communication errors," says Vakil.

Solution

Vakil Housing started using the consumer version of Google Apps in 2007 to collaborate internally and with customers. "I had used Google Docs with my Gmail account, and I thought it would be a simple way to share information with our customers," recalls Vakil. "With Google Docs, I knew that we would be able to update status in real-time, along with pictures, so that customers could see the progress for themselves."

About Google Apps for Business

Google Apps for Business is an enterprise-ready suite of applications that includes Gmail, Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Docs and Spreadsheets (online document hosting and collaboration), Google Sites (team site creation and publishing), and Google Video* (easy, secure sharing of video content).

*Google Video is not available in all countries

For more information, please visit
www.google.co.in/apps

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The company also began using Google Spreadsheets to share updates across various departments. "The real-time sharing was more efficient and there were fewer communication errors than the previous practice of emailing documents among departments," says Vakil.

In 2010, the company migrated to Google Apps for Business, the version of Google Apps that is optimized for professional use, and expanded its use of Google's tools to include email, calendaring, websites, and more. According to Vakil, employees' familiarity with the applications made the shift to Google Apps for 75 users quick and easy. "The easy-to-use interface of Google Apps made the transition smooth and didn't require much training," he says.

Gmail, already familiar to most employees and simple to use, became the company's primary email system. "With email going into the cloud and Postini's email archiving, maintaining our servers and email environment was no longer necessary, freeing up IT staff to manage our ERP solution," says Vakil. "We now have better security with Google Apps' Postini features, searchable email, and virtually limitless inbox space."

The company uses Google Calendar to keep departments informed of ongoing activities. Property registrations, for example, require the co-ordination of branch offices, the legal team, and customers. The customer care team is also involved with setting up appointments for customers. By creating a calendar accessible to all involved, property registrations and appointments can be coordinated efficiently. Google Calendar also helps staff book conference rooms and stay informed of holidays and important events.

Google Spreadsheets and Google Forms are used to report each department's progress to top management and create ready-made checklists for an error-free way of handing over villas to clients. Externally, prospective clients use Google Forms to book properties online.

Vakil Housing tapped Google Sites to build its corporate intranet. Each department also has its own internal website. "Previously, every department maintained a document to share their activities with the rest of the company," says Vakil. "The current solution using Google Sites is interactive and leaves less room for error."

Results

Vakil is enthusiastic about using Google Apps because it has delivered a simpler, more effective way of working and keeps a dispersed staff with multiple offices coordinated. The web-based applications and syncing with mobile devices enables staff to work on the go and be more productive than they were when information was accessible only when employees were in the office.

Google Apps has also freed time for IT staff to spend on more strategic activities than managing servers and inbox quotas. "The added security and the cloud computing technology has made the shift to Google Apps worthwhile," says Vakil. "Previously, our dependence on Microsoft Exchange tapped the limited resources of our two-person IT department."

Vakil appreciates Google's consistent enhancements. "We've noticed over the years that Google consistently releases regular updates to its suite of applications, and has also opened up its architecture to integrate with other applications via the Google Apps Marketplace so we can maximise our choices for using cost-effective, integrated cloud solutions," he says. "With Google's constant innovation, our team is excited to use Google Apps in the work place."

For Vakil Housing, the biggest benefit of using Google Apps is real-time collaboration, which Vakil says has spurred internal innovation as well. "It's good to see how our employees have embraced the anywhere, anytime availability and the freedom of Google Apps," says Vakil. "With Google Apps, people have taken the initiative to improve processes even without management involvement. Our employees enjoy the real-time sharing and the collaboration features – and it has motivated them to work better."

