

TIME TO GO GOOGLE?



> In March 2013, BloomNet migrated its operating system to Google Apps. The change connected the company's diverse workforce, which is "geographically distributed" throughout the United States, according to Marc Grzeskowiak, BloomNet's vice president of technology.

Shifting to Google has led to increased communication and team engagement but it hasn't been without its challenges. "At the outset, the majority of our team did not see the inherent value in switching to Google Apps," Grzeskowiak said. "Most even suggested the initial learning curve and resulting inefficiency were not worth the expected gain."

Eight months after the switch, Grzeskowiak said most employees are beginning to see a return on their personal re-training investment. We talked this month with Grzeskowiak to find out more about BloomNet's experiences, and the best features Google has to offer industry businesses.

Renato Sogueco: What was the biggest challenge of the shift to the Google Apps product line?

Marc Grzeskowiak: Embracing truly web-based email and calendar applications at work. For employees who were already familiar with web-based services (Yahoo, Gmail), rather than Microsoft Outlook, this was an easier transition. What we didn't realize at first as a team, however, was that basic applications we rely on for personal email don't necessarily have all the usability features needed for work. For example, in my personal email, I rarely need to review an email thread that spans several days and involves several people. At work, doing just that ensures you understand the full

scope of a discussion. Both Outlook and Google provide this capability, but their interfaces are different, and the shift required an adjustment period.

RS: What has been the most useful product?

MG: Google Drive. Before Drive, we had to rely on a shared network drive to share files, which is a situation that many businesses in the floral industry face. Now, for the first time, we have an easy, intuitive and relatively secure means to share and distribute files among team members (relatively secure because, while your servers and repositories are protected against cyber attacks, file security is ultimately dependent upon files not getting in the wrong hands). Our employees can access Drive from a browser, but there is also a helpful utility that can be installed on their desktops as a local folder. Any documents already in their Google Drive accounts will automatically synch to their computers, and vice versa. This capability has proven extremely beneficial during travel or Internet outages.

RS: Have any products fallen short of expectations?

MG: At first, Google Docs, Google Sheets and Google Slides appeared to offer the same functionality as traditional word processing, spreadsheet and presentation software. Unfortunately, the capabilities of this group of Google products taper off quickly and provide limited value to our intermediate to advanced users. One of the biggest shortfalls is working with multi-worksheet spreadsheets that have complex calculations and formulas, such as VLookups. To date, we continue to leverage MS Excel for these capabilities and employ Google Drive to share the document.

RS: Beyond the Google Apps product line, how else have you been using Google?

MG: At first we thought of Google+ as a kind of Facebook; you can share photos and posts with friends. Most team members were put off by the thought of using "Facebook" at work. I was too. Formally introducing a social network into the workplace appeared to contradict the fundamental attraction to social sites, which by their nature, develop organically and often virally. Users were never told to use them. But I think Google+ has



the potential to fundamentally change how we communicate, interact and share information within BloomNet.

RS: How has your team reacted to Google+?

MG: We introduced Google+ in March 2013 and the first few months amounted to a contrived exercise. No one was running to Google+ to post updates or images, and if they did, it was after a reminder went out to use it more frequently. The process reminded me of mom saying, "You'll eat your broccoli and you'll like it!" Fast forward to early summer, and the persistence paid off. Team members started posting work-related topics, including details on visits to florists, project updates and, yes, even personal updates! We've seen our geographically distributed team come together in one place to communicate, share and interact. More important, they've done it willingly, on their own accord. We're even using Google Hangouts (instant messaging and video chat platform). Initially it was fun to use video and see the people you normally speak to on the phone, but it has now become part of our culture that we communicate via video. 📺

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