GOOGLE APPS IMPLEMENTATION IN AN ONLINE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The implementation of Google Apps at the UOC is an innovative, highly transformative project whose purpose is to make collaborative, highly productive tools available to everyone involved in the institution's academic work, management and governability.

Google Apps are an innovative, constantly evolving platform that covers most communication and cooperative work needs. The project to implement Google Apps at the UOC goes beyond the mere acquisition of a work and productivity platform. From the very beginning, the UOC's intention has been to integrate Google Apps in all of the institution's technological and organizational activities in order to give an integrated, transparent, quality response to all of the institution's users.

This project took its first steps with adoption by the administrative staff and faculty of the mail and agenda tools where, among other things, we unified room booking and videoconference management in a system integrated with Google Calendar. The goal during 2015 was to implement the tools considered "essential" for people's daily work: Gmail, Calendar and Hangouts.

Keywords: Innovation, technology, google apps implementation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) is an innovative university that is rooted in Catalonia and open to the world, offering people lifelong learning to help them, and society, advance. Its educational model is based on personalization and student mentoring via e-learning; in fact, it was the first online university in Spain.

Within the University, the Technology Department ensures governability of the information systems and technological upgrading of the platforms and tools that drive teaching in a technology-based learning environment. This project can be placed within the framework of the UOC's Information Systems Strategic Plan (Master Plan) for the period 2014-2018.

2 METHODOLOGY

We have performed a number of actions to make the user's transition to the cloud more comfortable:

1 UOC Google Guides group
One of the most valuable and positive initiatives in the implementation of Google Apps. Thanks to a group of highly proactive people, it has been possible to implement Google Apps in the entire organization's daily work. These people have acted as ambassadors, they have settled doubts and shared concerns and some very good ideas.

2 Support material, self-learning videos and Google Apps help website
One initiative of this project has been to create a Google Apps help website on which we have put all sorts of useful information so that the user can find answers to any doubt he or she may have in the use of Google Apps. The self-learning videos that have been created to answer the most frequently asked questions have been particularly appreciated.

3 Training
We organize training activities at regular intervals for the staff on the main Google Apps. We will also create an immersion protocol in Google Apps as part of the welcome package for new employees.

4 Information campaigns throughout the project
The information campaigns play a basic and very necessary role in the inclusion of Google Apps. Advertisements, interviews, posters, etc. We have used key times during the project to focus the user on a common goal.

5 Key technology transition and adaptation actions
So that the entire institution could transition to Google Apps, it has been necessary to undertake a number of technology adaptation and improvement actions. For example: it was necessary to close the old room booking system when Google Calendar was implemented. During 2017, we are planning to make many improvement adaptations on our Campus with the goal of making Google Apps accessible to the entire community.

3 RESULTS
The UOC is a very large and diverse University community. In round numbers, currently it has 50,000 students studying one of 22 degrees or 35 masters available; in any one of the 6,000 virtual classrooms. The UOC has 60,000 graduates in all of its studies. It has more than 50,000 prospective students. All of it is managed by about 5,000 people, divided by teachers and management staff.

The UOC provides services and productivity tools (for ex: email) to a community of more than 175,000 people. All of them will be affected by the google apps implementation of UOC, with new services and tools available for users.

Now that you know the data that place the UOC model, and the numeric data that it explain the action scenario of UOC as a university, the next question is: What do the UOC communities need to be able work and interact?

The answer has 4 aspects:
- A technological solution for work and productivity that's integrated with other tools and services. All its channeled through UOC Virtual Campus
- A synchronous and asynchronous communication system, to answer all 21st century communication and media needs.
- Productivity tools to allow students, teachers and University staff to organize the day to day activities.
- A document repository can be accessed anywhere, allowing teamwork and continuous collaboration.

![Fig. 3. GSuite products](image)

How contribute google apps to these needs?
- Messaging tools and synchronous and asynchronous communications. This include: Coordination capabilities and groups communications, debate and distribution lists. Streaming and building video. And synchronous communications through chat, audio and video in an integrated environment, which easy use.
- Time and contacts management tools.
- Storage space and document and media repository. Document creation tools and native capability for synchronous and asynchronous teamwork, and integrated collaboration levels management.

### 3.1 2015: Google apps Impacts agreement

On 2015 a process of agreements and premises has been made. This process allowed to defined a clear scope in google apps implementation. The main headlines were:

- All UOC communities must be part of change. Everyone participates, everyone enjoy the improvements and new services.
- The implementation must respond to all communication needs: Messaging, forum, debate, distribution lists, video conference, phone, video stream, and more.
- It must provide sufficient document storage capability and quality: multidevice access, multi-location, multi-user. Easy access, fast and friendly to documents. Sufficient space storage. Online work without document download need.
- It must guarantee privacy and information security: Security, document confidentiality, encrypt and role definition, and access rules.
- It must allow users and services scalability: The platform must to guarantee continuous improvement in services and tools. Continuous innovation, especially in higher education ambit. And the other hand, the UOC must have the capacity of continuous adaptation in this improvements and innovations (Adaptation to new times!!)
- It must provide mechanisms that it allows docent task and Campus integration: The tools aren’t never above management and teaching task. They aren’t the finality. They are the way.
It must allow the local storage and communications system substitution. The UOC is an institution with more than 25 years of history. In this years it has endowed technological mechanisms for answer all communications and storage needs. The Google Apps implementation must be consistent with those technological tools existence, and in some cases is necessary to resize or close down tools.

It must keep final user attention level. We not must to forget the willingness and user accompaniment philosophy. The user must feel attended in this change process, and the UOC must provide mechanisms that make this accompaniment possible.

3.2 2015: First steps in google apps implementation

In 2015 the UOC began the first google apps implementation tasks, consisting of:

- Close of Exchange service and Gmail and Inbox use promote to staff. The adhoc web-mail was not active for teacher collaborators and students yet.
- The old reservation rooms system was replaced with Google Calendar.
- Hangouts adoption as a communication tool integrated with Inbox, GMail and Calendar.

By the end of 2015, the UOC staff worked with normality with these tools.

3.3 2016: Drive implementation + Final User capacitation

The objective in 2016 was to promote use in Google Drive and Google docs by introducing:

- a collaboration work culture (synchronous and asynchronous).
- document access in multi device environments (desktop and mobile). The physical work place must not be a problem.
- a decrease of local storage usage, which has the effect of reducing acquisition costs, infrastructure maintenance and local hardware.
- document reorganization, level access and grant permissions, centered in the project or objective, not a physical environment.
- favour of document organization needs, document structures and levels of visibility and access.
- favour of learning needs, that the allow final user to reduce the learning curve in google apps adoption.

By the end of 2016 the staff team had the opportunity to attend to training and awareness sessions. Also, the google apps implementation project team did intensive support tasks to management and academics departments in UOC, for advice on the technical and organizational possibilities of Google Apps, and how Google Apps can help us with the daily tasks.

3.4 2017 & 2018: UOC google apps implementation to all community

In this year and 2018 the UOC objective consists of extending the google apps implementation to all of the UOC community. In this period, they will begin UOC Virtual Campus adaptations. These adaptations will make it possible for google apps and Campus integration, and the range of google apps tools will be made available to students and teaching collaborators.

4 CONCLUSIONS

During these years of intense work, we have learned that Google Apps is a platform that can be adapted to the specific needs of each community at the UOC. The project's fundamental and non-negotiable premise is the respect for each community's diversity and unique needs and to respond to the general demand for continual adaptation and innovation as part of our DNA.

REFERENCES

