



Customer: Poarch Band of Creek Indians

Website: www.poarchcreekindians-nsn.gov

Customer Size: 288 employees

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Government—Local

Customer Profile

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians has lived in southern Alabama for almost 200 years. The Poarch Creek Tribal Government provides social services to residents living on the Poarch Creek Indian Reservation.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Online Services
 - Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite
 - Microsoft Exchange Online
 - Microsoft Forefront Online Protection for Exchange
- Solutions
 - Software-plus-services

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Poarch Creek Indians Up Email Reliability and Avoid \$30,000 Cost with Cloud Email

“With Microsoft Online Services and our Enterprise Agreement, we’re getting all the latest software and saving a lot of money at the same time. It’s been a big win for us.”

Ross Parham, IT Director, Poarch Band of Creek Indians

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians depends on email to run all aspects of tribal government. To avoid an expensive messaging system upgrade, the tribal government migrated to Microsoft Exchange Online, a cloud-based email service. The group avoided a U.S.\$30,000 capital expense and eliminated email maintenance work. It also instantly gained the latest email software, improved business continuity, and better service for remote workers.

Business Needs

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians descended from the original Creek Nation, which once lived throughout almost all of Alabama and Georgia. Unlike many southeastern United States American Indian tribes, the Poarch Creek Indians were not removed from their tribal lands and have lived for nearly 200 years in and around the reservation in southern Alabama, 57 miles east of Mobile.

Organizationally, the Poarch Creek Indians have three key groups: Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority operates a number of businesses that include entertainment, recreation,

hospitality, service, manufacturing, farming, and healthcare. PCI Gaming Authority operates the Tribe’s gaming activities. And the Poarch Creek Tribal Council heads the Tribal Government, which runs a reservation school, the police force and judiciary, healthcare, and other social services. Each group manages its own technology infrastructure.

The Tribal Government employs 288 people who work in 22 buildings across the reservation. Email messaging is crucial to their ability to communicate and share information. However, the group’s aging email server software, Microsoft Exchange Server 2003, needed an upgrade. The

server failed about once a week because mailboxes were overloading server capacity and there were insufficient network resources. Traveling employees had to access their email using a clunky webmail interface and virtual private network (VPN) connections, which slowed the tribe's data network. Ross Parham, IT Director for Poarch Creek Tribal Government, spent at least two hours a week cleaning out mailboxes and backing up email.

"When email went down, it impacted most departments," Parham says. By late 2009, the unreliability and extra work made the tribal government realize that it needed to do something—but, it wasn't eager to spend U.S.\$30,000 to upgrade email hardware and software.

Solution

Parham found out about the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite from an IT colleague at Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority, which had just licensed the service for its employees. The Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, part of Microsoft Online Services, is a subscription-based service for online email, collaboration, instant messaging, and videoconferencing software. Parham got a quick demo and liked what he saw.

Parham purchased 200 licenses in January 2010 and migrated users with no outside help. "The online portal for Microsoft Exchange Online [the suite's email component] includes a checklist for the whole migration process, and it was very straightforward," Parham says.

Traveling employees can now access their email from any web browser, without the need to create VPN connections. "They

enjoy very fast email performance using their familiar Outlook client," Parham says, referring to employees' use of the Microsoft Outlook 2010 messaging and collaboration client. "From my perspective, I don't have to worry about email going down." Parham was able to discontinue a third-party mail-filtering service, replacing it with Microsoft Forefront Online Protection for Exchange, a spam- and virus-filtering program that is included with Exchange Online.

Poarch Creek Tribal Government is investigating the other Business Productivity Online Standard Suite components—Microsoft SharePoint Online, Microsoft Office Live Meeting, and Microsoft Office Communications Online—which would provide easy document sharing, instant messaging, and web conferencing. It also purchased a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement, which simplifies license management and provides easy upgrades for Windows operating systems, Microsoft Office, and some Microsoft server products.

Benefits

By switching to Exchange Online, the Poarch Creek Tribal Government was able to instantly upgrade its messaging environment, avoid a \$30,000 expense, dramatically improve business continuity, reduce IT work, and improve user experience.

Rapid Deployment of Latest Technology

The Poarch Creek Tribal Government was able to instantly acquire the latest email software without the expense and work of an upgrade. "Upgrading from Exchange Server 2003 to Exchange Server 2007 would require more servers, a more complex network, and quite a bit of

testing," Parham says. "With Exchange Online, we got the latest version of Exchange Server without any of that. I have more time to do other things, such as virtualizing our server environment. I wouldn't have had time for this without taking email management off my plate."

Improved Business Continuity

The tribal government now has improved email reliability. "Before Exchange Online, we had email outages once a week, and now email is up all the time," Parham says. "Remote users can access email all the time, from anywhere."

Having email running in Microsoft data centers is especially reassuring when hurricanes bear down on southern Alabama. "We shut down all of our IT equipment during a hurricane threat, but with Exchange Online, we still have the ability to communicate and run our affairs," Parham says.

Cost Avoidance of \$30,000

By moving to Exchange Online, the tribe avoided spending \$30,000 on messaging infrastructure upgrades. Plus, "It's much easier for me to ask for the monthly Microsoft Online Services fee than to ask for \$30,000," Parham says. "In three years, I'd be asking again. Now, I always have the latest software version, and I can put that money toward new servers and storage."

The tribe also saved \$3,000 annually on the third-party mail-filtering service and the cost of installing a separate disaster recovery facility. "With Microsoft Online Services and our Enterprise Agreement, we're getting all the latest software and saving a lot of money at the same time," Parham says. "It's been a big win for us."