



## MEP MEETING & EXHIBITION PLANNERS MIGRATES TO WINDOWS SMALL BUSINESS SERVER 2003 FROM LINUX AS PLATFORM FOR GLOBAL EXPANSION

### Overview

**Country:** Malaysia

**Industry:** Services

### Customer Profile

Kuala Lumpur-based MEP Meeting & Exhibition Planners (MEP) was established in 1994, focusing on planning meetings and exhibitions. It has since expanded its services to include marketing and interactive services.

### Business Situation

MEP had deployed a file and print server running on a free Linux operating system while its mail server solution was Sendmail, a Linux-based email solution. As its business expanded, its Linux systems had trouble coping with the burgeoning business demands.

### Solution

To replace its Linux systems, MEP chose Windows Small Business Server 2003 Premium Edition. MEP now runs Windows Server 2003, Exchange Server 2003 and Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2000. It plans to leverage on SQL Server and Windows SharePoint Services at a later date.

### Benefits

- Reliability boosts customer service
- OWA advantage
- Integrated convenience
- Comprehensive functionalities
- Geared for growth

“We’re at the stage where we need to go the extra mile for our customers. And world-class IT solutions like Windows Small Business Server 2003 allow us to do that and be more effective in achieving our business goals.”

Karen Soo, Chief Executive Officer, MEP Meeting & Exhibition Planners Sdn Bhd

As MEP Meeting & Exhibition Planners’ (MEP) business expanded rapidly, its Linux-based IT systems could not adequately cope with the burgeoning demands. Although its Linux-based email system provided basic functionality, it did not contain all the features MEP required. The mail server frequently came down and this adversely affected business communications with its clients.

Needing a very user-friendly and easy to maintain IT platform, MEP replaced its Linux systems with Windows Small Business Server 2003. MEP now has a highly stable and reliable mail server which ensures its critical business communications system is always available. More importantly, Windows Small Business Server 2003 enables MEP to focus on growing its business rather than diverting valuable time and resources to trouble-shoot its IT systems.

## Situation

MEP Meeting & Exhibition Planners Sdn Bhd (MEP) was established in 1994, focusing on planning meetings and exhibitions. Based in Kuala Lumpur, MEP has since expanded its services to include marketing and interactive services.

In the area of marketing services, MEP assists clients in opening new markets for new products or consolidating the position of established products. Its interactive services include online marketing, web-hosting and loyalty programs.

In recent years, MEP has also grown its business regionally. Its portfolio of clients includes established Malaysian companies and multi-national corporations operating in Malaysia and the Asian region.

When MEP started up, it only had several workers but its staff strength has now increased to about 30. Almost a decade ago, MEP opted to build its IT system on the Linux platform. It deployed a file and print server running on a free Linux operating system while its mail server solution was Sendmail, a Linux-based email solution.

“We were then a new start-up and wanted to keep our IT investments and operating costs low,” explains Karen Soo, MEP’s Chief Executive Officer and co-founder. Further, MEP’s then chief technology officer was “very Linux-driven” and the Linux systems were basically supported internally.

However, with the growth of MEP’s business, the Linux-based server often came down and MEP’s IT resources were often bogged down with having to reboot the server. According to Karen, it was not unusual for the staff to reboot the Sendmail server “sometimes more than once a day.”

“Much of our communications with customers is email based. And once the mail server is down, we couldn’t send out or receive emails. The frequent downtime was very disruptive to our business communications. It was very frustrating!,” Karen laments.

Although the Linux-based system adequately provided basic functionality, it did not contain all the features that MEP wanted. The system did not provide MEP with the capability to control web surfing, instant messaging and downloading of non-work related video and audio files by staff. “As our resources were growing, we needed to have manageability in terms of bandwidth,” adds Karen.

Getting technical support for the Linux platform was also more difficult, notes Karen. Though the initial start up cost may be low, she admits that cost of Linux support was significantly higher.

The problem was compounded by the fact that MEP’s current IT staff were not as familiar with the Linux solution as they were with programs from other software vendors. When their Linux solutions encountered problems, MEP sometimes had to contact their former IT staff to get advice on resolving the issues.

Finally, the MEP management decided that the time was ripe to switch to a new solution that will meet their business needs. “Our business is growing and we need a system that is able to support us,” says Karen.

## Solution

While MEP’s server platform had been on Linux, its front end was running on the Windows platform. It had been using Microsoft Office as its office productivity suite for a number of years.

Karen admits that maintaining two platforms was not ideal, and decided to leverage on the benefits of having a standardized IT platform. The Windows Server platform was the obvious choice in view of the issues which MEP had with the Linux-based system. "Our IT staff did the necessary evaluation and we decided to deploy Windows Small Business Server 2003," says Karen.

"Windows Small Business Server 2003 is an integrated package with extensive functionalities at a very reasonable cost. And there's no need to pay for costly customization work," she adds.

The migration to Windows Small Business Server 2003 Premium Edition was completed smoothly in June 2006. MEP runs Windows Server 2003, Exchange Server 2003 and Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2000, which provides for network security and system performance tools. MEP plans to utilize the SQL Server database later as well as leverage on Windows SharePoint Services for its collaboration portal.

MEP engaged Digital DNA (M) Sdn Bhd, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, to deploy the Windows Small Business Server 2003 solution. Digital DNA also provides post implementation support.

Karen adds that a key advantage of the solution was that it is very user-friendly and easy to maintain. For an SME like MEP which has a small IT team, this is a vital consideration.

"It's easy to maintain and there are a lot of wizards to guide our IT staff," she says. In addition, there is a wealth of good Microsoft partners such as Digital DNA to provide support to the IT team, she adds.

"Windows Small Business Server 2003 enables us to focus on growing our business

rather than running around trouble-shooting our IT systems," Karen adds.

## Benefits

### Reliability boosts customer service

In Exchange Server 2003, MEP has a highly stable and reliable mail server which ensures its critical business communications system is always available. And this ensures that customer relationships are not jeopardized because of frustrating breakdowns in communication.

With MEP expanding its business globally, this becomes an even more crucial issue particularly as many of its customers are multinational corporations. "We communicate almost exclusively with our overseas customers via email. If our clients can't reach us by email, this not only adversely affects business operations it also damages our reputation," she says.

"With Exchange Server 2003, we are able to respond quickly to our clients and this leads to better customer service," Karen explains.

### OWA advantage

With half of its staff having to stage meetings and exhibitions, go on road shows and travel on business, Exchange Server 2003 offers MEP staff a mobility they never had under the old mail solution.

Exchange Server 2003's Outlook Web Access feature allows staff to access their emails, calendars and contact lists from anywhere with an Internet-enabled PC, PDA or GPRS cell phone. MEP staff do not have to face the inconvenience of going back to the office to retrieve or send emails.

"So there's no reason why our staff cannot be reached, even when they are working outside the office. This greatly enhances the efficiency and productivity of our staff."

Karen says that the company's event managers will be equipped with GPRS smart phones so that they can access their emails and respond to customers from anywhere and anytime. "Exchange Server 2003 can push emails to our GPRS phones. It's a really good feeling knowing that we are connected all the time. We don't need to lug along a notebook PC."

"Being in the service industry, this gives us a cutting edge. We are able to respond faster to our clients," she adds.

#### **Integrated convenience**

The tight integration under the Windows Server platform allows the component applications to leverage on Windows Server 2003 functionalities such as Active Directory and automatic backup.

MEP staff now enjoy the single log-on convenience of Active Directory when accessing their emails as Exchange Server 2003 is integrated with Windows Server 2003. For the IT staff, it simplifies the maintenance of the system as only one set of user IDs and passwords is required.

With Active Directory services, the IT Department is also able to assign the appropriate folder access rights to specific users or group of users. For example, the Human Resources Department folders can't be accessed by other departments. This has streamlined and improved security in terms of accessing information on the company's network, says Karen.

Network security and bandwidth management has also improved drastically with ISA Server. "ISA server helps us manage bandwidth better by ensuring staff do not misuse Internet privileges," she says. With ISA Server, MEP is able to track individual internet usage, and this has led to greater productivity particularly among the temporary

staff. The automatic backup function of Windows Server 2003 has also eased the effort to protect information stored in the Exchange mail server. The automatic backup of the mail server is done daily compared to previously where backup of emails was done once a fortnight.

"With Windows Small Business Server 2003, we are getting four servers in one integrated package. The applications are in one hardware box, so it is easy for the IT administrator to manage it."

"To get similar functionalities under the Linux platform, we would have to integrate various third party applications. Instead of having just one server box, we would have ended up with three or four servers." Karen argues that Windows Small Business Server 2003 is definitely more efficient and cost effective.

#### **Comprehensive functionalities**

Windows Small Business Server 2003 provides a host of functionalities which was not available under Sendmail and the Linux platform. With Sendmail, MEP users basically viewed it as a tool to just send and receive emails.

However, with Microsoft Outlook 2003, users can avail themselves to functionalities such as calendaring, contact lists and tasks. Karen says that such features enable the employees to be more organized and productive.

Another bonus which comes at no extra cost to MEP is the Windows SharePoint Services technology within Windows Server 2003. Windows SharePoint Services is an integrated portfolio of collaboration and communication services to connect people, information, processes, and systems both within and beyond the corporate firewall.

## For More Information

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For more information about MEP Meeting & Exhibition Planners' services, call +6(03) 7782 9692 or visit the website at

[www.mep.com.my](http://www.mep.com.my)

For more information about Digital DNA's products and services, call +603 7803 2362 or visit the web site at

[www.CHASSAsia.com](http://www.CHASSAsia.com)

MEP plans to leverage on the technology to develop a collaboration portal linking not only the staff but also customers as well. For example, MEP will be able to share large files with customers through the portal.

"Sometimes our foreign customers have email restrictions on receiving large files. So instead of sending such files via email, we will put it on the portal for customers to view."

### Geared for growth

With MEP aspiring to penetrate into global markets, the need for a world class IT infrastructure is imperative. "If we don't put a quality IT infrastructure in place, we won't be able to grow as much as we should."

"Windows Small Business Server 2003 was the correct choice for us. Its added functionalities help our business to be more productive. The Windows Server platform will help us to realize our potential," she adds.

"We're at the stage where we need to go the extra mile for our customers. And world-class IT solutions like Windows Small Business Server 2003 allow us to do that, and to be more effective in achieving our business goals," affirms Karen.

## Software and Services

### ■ Products

- Windows Small Business Server 2003 Premium Edition

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