SURF Success Story

How ownCloud and Collabora Increased Productivity In The Dutch University and Research Landscape

Background

SURF is the collaborative ICT organization for Dutch education and research. SURF links all 14 Dutch universities, 36 universities of applied sciences and 70 other research institutions helping them to develop, implement and maintain their IT infrastructure so they can offer students, teachers and researchers access to the best Internet connectivity and digital collaboration.

Secure exchange of data is critical for university and scientific operations. Keeping this in mind, SURF deployed SURFdrive, their own instance of ownCloud, as its central file sharing platform in 2014. SURFdrive was introduced due to the growing need expressed by employees to create a uniform and productive solution for exchanging data between the connected institutional ecosystem. The solution needed to combine the features of a Dropbox with the high level of security necessary for research and education purposes.

Naturally, as a research and education collaborative network, SURF faces stringent data security requirements compared to the private sector. The regulations are based on the internationally recognized ISO 270001 standard and are formulated under the Framework of Legal Standards for (Cloud) Services.

To solve this challenge, SURF engaged in an extensive test and comparison process in order to evaluate ownCloud against other solutions. ownCloud emerged as the preferred solution as it provided maximum freedom in designing SURF's own IT infrastructure by allowing data to be hosted on their respective servers.

Problem

While integration of ownCloud responds to the SURF's need for having a file sharing platform, SURF still needed to choose an online productivity office suite to complement the file sharing platform.

A file-sharing platform, that is self-hosted, offers the possibility to exchange data efficiently and securely. However, when dealing with documents, tables and presentations that require being edited collaboratively, it is imperative for the team to be able to see the changes in real time. Particularly, when multiple people work on editing the same document at the same time.

The employees of all the institutions connected to SURF wanted a file-sharing platform with which they could conveniently carry out their day-to-day coordination tasks together. The administrators were already aware that a self-hosted infrastructure had to function as smoothly as the comparable solutions of the large proprietary providers (Google Docs, Office 365). Otherwise, the technology provided would only be accepted hesitantly or by not all the employees who could switch to another solution for their convenience. This circumstance is often seen as the main reason for the emergence of so-called „shadow IT's", i.e. the situation in which employees use their own solutions in parallel to their company's official infrastructure. This cannot only impose a productivity risk, but also it can introduce a security risk for the whole organization. SURF, by all means, wanted to avoid the alternate scenario.

Solution

SURF desired a long term solution, a platform that would not only solve the core file sharing issue but at the same time offer the possibility of future innovation and collaboration. ownCloud also offers the possibility to integrate the collaboration platform Collabora into the customer's infrastructure.

With Collabora, users can access their office documents directly via the user interface of their ownCloud, create new content, edit and work on the same documents with other users. All authorized users can follow the changes in real time. The users needn't worry about

possible revised version conflicts that could otherwise arise during simultaneous processing of files.

With the current version of Collabora Online, it is also possible to share and open files directly via a public link. This is a quick and easy solution to integrate users who do not have an existing ownCloud account. All the external user needs to do is click on the public link and they can immediately work and collaborate on a document.

„We decided to rely on Collabora at a very early stage", emphasizes William van Santen, Product Manager SURFdrive. "The fact that the solution was supported by ownCloud right from the start was a key factor in this decision, as it ensured smooth operation right from the start. When implementing the new solution, we could directly contact the joint support team of ownCloud and Collabora at any time."

Result

SURF announced in December 2018 that it had reached the 40,000 user mark, with each user managing an average of 10 GB of data via SURFdrive. In addition to using SURFdrive, 1,500 users per day also access Collabora. This is indicative of the fact that file sharing and collaboration on an open source basis is well established across the Dutch university and research landscape.

"The high acceptance of our own Sync-and-Share solution in times of Office 365 and many other commercial alternatives makes us at SURF proud: It shows that together with ownCloud and Collabora we have created an IT infrastructure that not only meets the high security requirements, but can also keep up with the large enterprises in terms of performance and usability."

William van Santen, Product Manager SURFdrive

Read more about ownCloud and Collabora.

About ownCloud

ownCloud is the largest Open Source Filesharing solution in the world with 200.000 installations and more than 25 million users. The Open Platform for Secure Enterprise Filesharing combines consumer-grade usability with enterprise-grade security. It enables users to access data no matter where it is stored or which device is used. By giving organizations the visibility and control required to manage sensitive data while offering users the modern collaboration experience they demand, productivity and security are increased at the same time. For more information, visit:

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