

Basin Electric Power Cooperative

Electric Power Cooperative Deploys YouSendIt to End E-Mail Outages and FTP Frustrations



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Basin Electric Power Cooperative, headquartered in Bismarck, N.D., is one of the largest electric generation and transmission cooperatives in the United States. With 135 member rural electric systems, the not-for-profit cooperative operates with eight subsidiaries and a staff of 2,000, who serve some two million customers. Its engineers regularly generate very large files that each total hundreds of megabytes. Drawings, diagrams, inspection photographs and other documents need to be exchanged internally and with subsidiary locations. Additionally, the organization's marketing and public relations department produces books, annual reports and other publications that require collaboration with designers and printers.

THE PROBLEM

- Employees would send 200-300 megabyte files that would clog the system to the point that the organization had no e-mail access for 30 minutes at a time.
- Some files, as large as one gigabyte, would destroy server files.
- Files often were too big for the recipient's system to accept.
- FTP use required time-consuming instruction from IT staff.
- Employees had to decide when to use FTP and when to try e-mail.

THE SOLUTION

- With YouSendIt Corporate Suite, Basin Electric gained a digital file delivery capability that was transparent to its staff, easy to use and easy to administer.
- The YouSendIt Microsoft Outlook plug-in made it as easy to send a large file as it is to send an e-mail message.
- The e-mail system administrators and support staff took back time usually spent troubleshooting the email system or training end users. HR and accounting gained the ability to transmit sensitive files securely and easily.



Situation and Challenges

Basin Electric Power Cooperative, headquartered in Bismarck, N.D., is one of the largest electric generation and transmission cooperatives in the United States. With eight subsidiaries, the not-for-profit cooperative operates with a staff of 2,000, who serve some two million customers. The organization's 135 member rural electric systems extend across Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming. Basin Electric also operates the nation's only coal gasification plant.

Engineers who design and build power plants for Basin Electric subsidiaries consistently generate very large files that each total hundreds of megabytes. Drawings, diagrams, inspection photographs and other documents need to be exchanged internally and with subsidiary locations. Additionally, the organization's marketing and public relations department produces books, annual reports and other publications that require collaboration with designers and printers. All of these files consume a tremendous amount of digital space. Basin Electric's two fulltime photographers, for example, use cameras with resolutions exceeding 10 megapixels that produce photos of 60 to 75 megabytes each. And in some instances, the marketing staff assembles multiple articles with graphics into a single document, producing an exceptionally large file.

Engineers and other staff had tried to deliver these digital files by e-mail or FTP, but these methods were troublesome and often tied up the entire organization's ability to communicate.

"Every week we receive and send nearly 350,000 e-mails," said Basin Electric Senior Desktop Application Analyst Greg Schuchard. "We had no limit on the size of e-mail attachments that we allowed, so people here would send 200-300 megabyte files that would slow up our system to the point that we had no e-mail access for 30 minutes at a time. One person tried to send a 1 gigabyte file attachment, and it destroyed files on the server. I had to spend six hours rebuilding the server with help from Microsoft."

Furthermore, even when staff succeeded in sending out large attachments, the files often were too big for the recipient's system to accept.

The FTP server presented other problems. First, it left the decision up to users when to use e-mail if a file exceeded the recommended limits. Additionally, it dictated an entire set of its own instructions to explain how to move a file to the FTP site and how to pull the file down. "FTP is just not transparent to the user," Schuchard explained. "This is not an IT shop; it's an office. We have accountants, photographers and others who do their job well, and they don't want to have to do someone else's job, too, to deliver a file."

In the human resources and accounting groups, employees also were having difficulties with software that encrypted very sensitive files relating to healthcare, salaries, benefits and other topics so that they could be e-mailed securely. The software provider did not intend to upgrade the application to be compatible with Office 2007.

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“ I was looking for a solution to automatically transfer files that provided better security than FTP and was transparent to the user—plus was simple to deploy and manage. I found that with YouSendIt. ”

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Senior Desktop Application Analyst
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Solution

In the fall of 2009, Schuchard began looking for a solution to these issues that would be so easy for staff to use that they would hardly know they were using it. “I wanted to come up with an alternative for sending large e-mails with zero or minimal decision processes by the user,” he said. “I was looking for a solution to automatically and seamlessly transfer files with the same security as FTP but that was transparent to the user. I found that with YouSendIt.”

With transparency for the user, ease of administration and ease of implementation as his primary criteria, Schuchard had tried out three or four products before discovering YouSendIt. One product he tested never worked. Another would have required him to spend hours reading a manual to learn how to set up the application. “I didn’t want to deal with that,” he said. “We don’t contract out for implementation. If I can set it up with minimum reference to the manual and minimum calls to support centers, that’s what I pick.”

Why YouSendIt?

Schuchard evaluated YouSendIt’s ease of use and was very happy with the results. He found that YouSendIt met all his criteria for transparency, ease of use and implementation, security and speed. YouSendIt offers a variety of methods to send files, Outlook plug-in, web, 3rd party application plug-ins and a lightweight desktop application. As a test, he downloaded the YouSendIt Express Application which allows you to send files from your desktop and sent the executable setup file to a couple of colleagues in his department to let them experience how they would receive YouSendIt messages. He asked them to install and test it with both internal and outside transmissions.

“I did screen shots, step by step, showing what they need to do from the first invitation e-mail,” he explained. “With my basic instructions, the average user was able to set up YouSendIt in about five minutes.”

Rollout

Schuchard met with all of the organization’s administrative assistants, explained YouSendIt and how it would benefit the company, and asked them for lists of people in the organization who should start using YouSendIt from day one. He also e-mailed other staff members to ask them to contact him if they felt they should be candidates for employing YouSendIt. In addition, he examined his e-mail usage reports to determine who was sending large files regularly, adding them to the lists.

Today, Basin Electric has installed YouSendIt Corporate Suite on 83 computers. It has become an integral part of the workflow for several departments, including engineering, human resources, marketing/public relations and accounting.

With the free plug-in provided by YouSendIt, staff can send large files directly through their Microsoft Outlook application via YouSendIt in the same way they send an e-mail message. The IT department set the automatic file size that should be delivered through YouSendIt and the application takes over from there.



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Results

Since implementing YouSendIt, Schuchard reported, "I have had no issues at all. Before, trying to send large files was really disruptive and often created unnecessary frustrations. Now everyone is happy."

Basin Electric is migrating from the encrypting software previously used by human resources and accounting to YouSendIt. "I had our security team review YouSendIt's security documentation," Schuchard said, "and they were very pleased with it."

YouSendIt's tracking features have proved especially beneficial to the accounting group, which sends bills to multiple customers at the same entity. Receiving an automatic receipt helps ensure the billing process is operating efficiently.

Overall, Basin Electric views YouSendIt as a major improvement over its FTP site, and the organization no longer experiences clogs in its e-mail system. "Previously," Schuchard observed, "if one person's e-mail attachment tied up the system, the other 1,999 employees would have to wait. Now we can get files through without impacting everyone else."

Schuchard no longer needs to spend hours fixing e-mail outages or instructing users on how to use FTP. "YouSendIt has sped up our e-mail and freed up IT staff, customer support and office support staff."

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