



How Nextcloud and ONLYOFFICE improve user storage mobility and document collaboration in North-West University

We are going to tell you the story of the North-West University (NWU) in South Africa where the combined solution of Nextcloud and ONLYOFFICE was implemented to ensure secure data exchange and safe collaboration on research documents. In this article, Hans Erasmus, a junior infrastructure architect at the NWU, shares the university experience.

About North-West University

The North-West University is a South African higher education and research institution with three campuses at Potchefstroom, Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark.

The NWU officially came into being on 1 January 2004 as a part of the South African government's plan to transform higher education. With its merged status and 8



NWU (Image by

<https://twitter.com/theNWU/status/1243564875433095174>)

faculties, the NWU became one of the largest universities in the region counting over 70,000 students.

The university has 3 physically distributed locations but maintains the main infrastructure from Potchefstroom, its head office.

In October 2017, the North-West University deployed Nextcloud and Collabora Online, providing students and employees a way to access, share and collaborate on their data on the go. A year later, the university migrated to the Nextcloud-ONLYOFFICE combo.

When security matters

Control over the data was a primary concern and a deciding factor in choosing the integrated document editing solution. According to Hans, some of the NWU's collaborative data is not meant to appear on 'leaky' platforms due to legislation and some other reasons. The university deals in various research fields, some of which contain ethical data, which in turn have very strict rules to abide by.

Hans comments:

"As is apparent throughout the times we live in, self-hosting is still the best solution to keeping your data safe. The biggest drive behind the Nextcloud and ONLYOFFICE integration was to supply a platform on which researchers could safely store, collaboratively work on and distribute data, all within their own control.

The use cases for collaborative work has broadened immensely since we started, especially since the three campuses have aligned faculties. All administrative work was made possible by using a single collaborative platform. Any time, any place, anywhere."

Implementing ONLYOFFICE

Hans became aware of ONLYOFFICE when the partnership with Nextcloud was announced at the Nextcloud Conference 2018.

Hans says that they were blown away with how well ONLYOFFICE was developed. The look and feel of the interface was a real glaring invitation to learn more. As the majority of the NWU users are Microsoft Office based, the familiarity of an interface counts as much, if

not more than the compatibility. Users are willing to learn new functionality as long as you can make it feel familiar.

The initial collaborative office deployment confirmed NWU fears that users would be unhappy with an unfamiliar looking solution,

"so when we learned of ONLYOFFICE, it was a proverbial knight in shining armor."

For now, about 6500 users have access to Nextcloud and ONLYOFFICE and they are very happy about it.

The most used features

Hans explains that editing, reviewing, tracking changes and chat are all used extensively:

"The sheer speed at which collaboration takes place within the documents is what I would regard as the most-used 'unseen' feature. Collaboration is as close to instantaneous as you would find, with very very little overhead. Track changes, chat and comments will probably feature very high up on the list as well."

With regards to experience of using ONLYOFFICE Desktop Editors, Hans comments that at the moment it is not sold to users as the status quo, but some individuals have done this all on their own, and are very impressed with the functionality. These are mainly Linux based users who do not have Microsoft Office installed by default, and it saves them the trouble of opening web pages to work on.

Hans points out: "Our philosophy is to try and supply our users with a set of tools to choose from. If they want to use a set of pliers to remove a nail from a piece of wood, they can, but if they want to use a hammer to drive the nail further inwards, that is also fine. We found the quickest way to antagonize users, is to impose a strict set of rules on how to do their daily work. We would rather give them excellent platforms like Nextcloud and ONLYOFFICE, and see them flourish."

Useful information

Download the full NWU case study:

nextcloud.com/onlyoffice

More success stories from ONLYOFFICE customers:

www.onlyoffice.com/customers.aspx

ONLYOFFICE official website:

www.onlyoffice.com

ONLYOFFICE address:

20A-6 Ernesta Birznieka-Upish street, Riga, Latvia, EU, LV-1050