

How CentraStage is helping Westminster Council keep IT running in schools.

FLEXIBILITY

In offering a Managed Service to Primary Schools, Westminster engineers spend a great deal of their time onsite maintaining networks for a number of schools.

Prior to CentraStage, Westminster used Virtual Network Computing (VNC) as their primary remote software. Whilst this has its strengths it limited them to working either from the main office, or at the specific school experiencing the issue. With CentraStage they are able to work from anywhere with a web connection, meaning the engineers can be at one school and resolve an emergency at another, simply by accessing CentraStage via a web browser. They can also perform remote takeover on devices when users are sitting at home, for example. Previously the network infrastructure made this impossible and the change has saved enormous amounts of time and unnecessary travel, as well as dramatically enhancing our flexible working capability.

Critically the CentraStage management browser gives them a method of keeping track of all our devices. The curriculum machines are usually set to Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP) so chasing the Internet Protocol (IP) address of a 'problem machine' used to involve onsite intervention, but now they can isolate machines in an instant so the end user support has improved.

EFFICIENCY

Software rollouts, particularly on Curriculum, were a headache and a big drain on resources. Although software roll-outs can be done via Active Directory (AD) they were limited to using Microsoft Installer (MSIs) files and rolling out to devices registered to that particular domain.

Using CentraStage they have the capability to roll out software to relevant or targeted devices in all of the schools at once if need be, meaning they can standardise the installation across the borough and they don't have to perform the same task on each domain. What's more, CentraStage can immediately install the packages instead of on reboot like AD, plus the system reports back on the success or failure of the install. Westminster can then use CentraStage to shut down the machines afterwards. It is also a lot easier to target a handful of machines on the fly through CentraStage, rather than creating groups in AD. The Helpdesk guys also use it to roll out reports for Capita's Schools Information Management System (SIMS) and push out updates. One engineer uses the system to schedule the shutdown of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) suite computers every night, saving the school hundreds of pounds a year in electricity.

Crucially they have a device at each school designated as the local CentraStage 'cache' – meaning that every school only downloads each package once over the Internet from the CentraStage server, with devices on the Local Area Network (LAN) then picking the package up from the cache - so there is no affect on the school's bandwidth usage.

VISIBILITY

Another great tool is the Inventory function within CentraStage, which maintains a 'live' database of all computer/server hardware and software, for all school devices. They know what software is installed where, and how many copies, and more importantly they can report this information to the school. The search and

'filtering' capabilities of CentraStage mean you can hop to a listing of all devices with, for example, certain software installed or a particular driver, and target them for an update patch, a script or even an uninstall command. The same can be performed for tasks based on hardware parameters (e.g. show me all Dell Latitude 550s across all schools).

One feature that Westminster are just starting to implement is the Monitoring feature. One of the engineers has set up CentraStage to monitor the File Transfer Protocol (FTP) Service on his offsite backup server, but they can easily configure a whole range of monitoring across the supported devices to tell them when SIMS stops, tell them when a server runs low on disk space, warn them when a Central Processing Unit (CPU) is running hot etc. The benefits to knowing about issues before they turn into a problem, being able to address the issue before systems grind to a halt, is a massive improvement to the way they work.

COST-SAVINGS

In summary the main business case for CentraStage was about cost-savings, but at the same time enhancing the Service they give to the schools. The ability for support staff to work from anywhere has proved crucial - like a lot of Boroughs, Westminster are really pushing the 'WorkSmart' initiative whereby staff are encouraged to take advantage of flexible working and encompass a 'work from anywhere' attitude. The team are actually reducing desk and office space requirements due to a combination of an online helpdesk, flexible telephony and CentraStage, which reduces costs and frees up money to spend on supporting ICT in schools. The other key advantage has been an increase in efficiency throughout the team - the benefits of CentraStage are now being factored in to many of our projects and it is saving countless hours along the way.

ABOUT CENTRASTAGE

CentraStage, a SIMS technical partner, is a remote device management technology designed specifically for Education service providers, to simplify the management and support of thousands of school devices, even over multiple and disparate networks and all through an intuitive web-based management interface. Core functionality includes audit, monitoring, remote support, software deployment and reporting.