



Microsoft Customer Solution Customer Solution Case Study



School Board Receives Top Marks with Microsoft Application Virtualization

Overview

Country or Region: Canada

Industry: Education

Partner: Itergy

Customer Profile

The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario in Kemptville, Ontario, serves 15,000 students from Ganonoque, Ontario in the south to Almont in the north, and as far east as the Quebec border.

Business Situation

CDSBEO was challenged to provide efficient PC management to the 50 schools across its 12,365 square-kilometre area. The existing PC management practices were time-consuming and expensive.

Solution

With help from Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Itergy, CDSBEO implemented Microsoft® Application Virtualization – part of the Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack (MDOP).

Benefits

- Improved PC performance
- Better application availability
- Time and cost savings
- Better resource allocation
- Improved inventory tracking

"Now the teachers see the IT department as more than service providers. We're partners in education."

James Proulx, Director, IT, Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario

Spanning 12,365 square kilometres and serving 15,000 students, the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario (CDSBEO) found it challenging to efficiently manage PCs across 50 schools. Distance was a constant issue: technicians spent up to an hour driving to each school for application repairs, which delayed resolutions and kept the IT department from completing other tasks. The board sought a streamlined desktop management process. With help from Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Itergy, CDSBEO implemented Microsoft Application Virtualization. Now applications are housed on a central server and presented in a virtualized environment on PCs. This helped enhance application availability, and saved time and money. The solution also facilitated IT-teacher relations, ensuring educators and students had consistent access to technologies important to the education process.



Microsoft®
Desktop Optimization Pack

Situation

Headquartered in Kemptville, Ontario, the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario (CDSBEO) serves numerous communities near Ottawa, Canada's national capital. The board operates 50 schools – both elementary and secondary – serving 15,000 students.

With the school board's district occupying an area that spans 12,365 square kilometres, sheer distance was a challenge for the IT department. The board strategically stations its seven IT staff members around the region to provide quick, efficient technology services to schools and board offices that employ 850 teachers and 400 support staff. Despite this, the IT department felt stretched, particularly with respect to PC management. Technicians found it difficult to keep lab and classroom computers up to date with the latest application enhancements and security improvements. Doing so required driving to each school to install software and verify performance. Given that it can take an hour on the highway to reach some schools, the process was time-consuming.

"We've calculated that we were losing 11,200 person-hours per year with the way we were operating," said James Proulx, CIO, CDSBEO. "We'd schedule software updates twice a year so technicians wouldn't have to travel so much, but that left the PCs vulnerable to security risks."

This also affected the IT department's ability to manage other technology tasks, such as hardware repairs. The department's work orders for such items would continue to grow and teachers would have to set aside malfunctioning PCs for weeks at a time.

Complicating matters were the numerous applications the school board was running. With as many as 105 programs for various classes, applications running on the same PC

sometimes interfered with one another, causing performance issues. Identifying and solving the problems required even more time from the IT department.

The first month of each new school year was especially challenging. While the IT department would research teachers' software requirements well in advance, invariably some teachers would need access to additional applications. This resulted in an influx of calls to the IT help desk. Technicians would spend hours driving to schools to load the missing software, delaying other projects and keeping teachers from following their planned curriculum.

The board sought a PC management solution that would free up the technicians' time, support application availability across all of the schools, and also allow the technicians to provide software and security updates in a timelier fashion.

"Better IT performance was our ultimate goal," Proulx said. "We wanted to provide students and teachers with the technologies and services they need to learn and educate."

Solution

After researching various options CDSBEO selected Microsoft® Application Virtualization to support its PC management enhancements. An integral part of the Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack (MDOP), Application Virtualization turns Windows®-based applications into centrally managed virtual services that can be delivered to any workstation or portable computer across an organization.

Applications are assigned to users via Active Directory®, an application directory that provides central authentication and authorization services for Windows-based

computers. Active Directory also allows administrators to easily assign policies, deploy software and apply critical updates. When users login to their PCs they instantly receive the latest version of the application streamed to their desktop from a centralized server. Applications are installed locally in a virtual cache so users get the capabilities of a rich powerful desktop with full offline access to the applications. Virtualizing applications also practically eliminates application-to-application compatibility issues.

Working with Microsoft Certified Gold Partner Itergy, CDSBEO began virtualizing applications in the summer of 2007, beginning with one school and quickly moving on to complete all of the secondary schools.

“The Board already had some excellent practices in place, such as strategically stationing technicians around the district for efficient response times,” said Riyaz Lalani, Corporate Account Manager, Itergy. “Microsoft Application Virtualization enhanced those processes by helping the board manage its software in a more efficient and effective manner from one central location.”

With the implementation completed in secondary schools in early 2009, the board was on track to deploy Microsoft Application Virtualization across the elementary schools. It wasn't long before users noticed a difference. “The teachers see that the IT department is much more responsive to their needs,” Lalani said. “This will allow the board to have a greater focus on initiatives that can impact student achievement.”

Benefits

Microsoft Application Virtualization has simplified software deployment, enhanced application availability, and provided time and cost savings, allowing for better resource

allocation and improved software asset tracking capabilities.

“We're able to react to changes far better,” Proulx said. “When a software provider comes out with a new version, we can deploy that immediately, whereas before we would have to wait six to 10 months to deliver the upgrade.”

Improved PC performance

By making the latest software and security updates immediately available, CDSBEO's computers are always operating at peak performance levels. As well, with applications running in a virtualized environment, inter-application compatibility issues have been virtually eliminated, decreasing system crashes. As a result, students and teachers have access to fully functioning PCs, with all necessary software and security features.

“Last year, right after the school year began, we received a software upgrade for the computers,” Proulx said. “In the past, it would have taken us months to roll it out. But this time we were done in less than one day.”

Enhanced application availability

Microsoft Application Virtualization helps CDSBEO access to all applications from any PC, so there's no need for the technicians to visit schools to install new software each September. Instead, if teachers decide they need access to an application not originally requested they can simply call it up on the computers.

This enhances the educational process. For example, the board used to install software for electronic whiteboards only on certain PCs, so only teachers in those particular classrooms could use the technology. Now the whiteboard software is available on all computers.

“Teachers see the IT department as service providers,” Proulx said. “We’re partners in education.”

Time and cost savings

Prior to implementing Microsoft Application Virtualization the Board was losing 11,200 person-hours per year to the inefficient PC management practices. Now travel has been reduced 30 to 40 per cent, “We’re looking into improving the way we update the security of our computer operating systems,” Proulx said. “We didn’t have the time before, but now we can give it the attention it deserves.”

Better resource allocation

Although technicians still visit schools, their trips are less frequent. And their time isn’t spent completely on PC maintenance. Instead they can apply their skills more strategically. For instance, the IT department has time to provide more thorough IT training to teachers to help them better leverage their technology resources. This enhances education, and facilitates IT-teacher relations. The technicians also have more time to consider IT architecture enhancements, such as server consolidation, and numerous other hardware issues. In the past a motherboard failure on a computer would take weeks to repair. Now technicians have time to address these repairs much sooner.

“We’re well on our way towards providing repairs within three days in the high schools and five days in the elementary schools – those are our goals,” Proulx said. “This isn’t just about saving time – it’s about delivering better service.”

Improved inventory tracking

CDSBEO also improved its ability to track software licences. The software metering capabilities in Microsoft Application Virtualization gives the IT department a better sense of which applications are in use, and

which ones can be terminated. This is particularly important for the school board because many applications change each year.

“We have a complete view of which applications are being used, and which ones should be cleared away,” Proulx said. “Our server infrastructure isn’t bloated with unused software.”

CDSBEO is moving ahead with implementing the four other components of MDOP: Microsoft Asset Inventory Service for software lifecycle management, Microsoft Advanced Group Policy Management for improved change management, Microsoft Diagnostic and Recovery Toolset to restore disabled PCs, and Microsoft System Center Desktop Error Monitoring for application and system error identification.

“Microsoft Application Virtualization was the silver bullet for the board’s desktop management issues,” Lalani said. “With our continued investment in MDOP, the IT department will be able to use the advanced group policy management capabilities for improved technology auditing and tracking.”

For More Information

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