Organization

Customer: University of Oxford

Site: www.ox.ac.uk

Industry: Education

Headquarters: Oxford, United Kingdom

Employees: 10,000

Challenges

One of Oxford University's IT teams needed a management solution for 3,000 endpoints that would streamline administration of a Windows 7 environment.

Solutions

- Symantec Client Management Suite
- Symantec Server Management Suite

Benefits

- Upgrade to Symantec Client Management Suite on 3,000 systems accomplished on tight schedule without issues or user disruption
- Estimated two outages prevented per year that would have been likely in previous environment, avoiding significant potential loss in user productivity
- 10x faster status reporting, accelerating software and patch deployments
- GB£10,000 (US$16,400) in additional hardware costs avoided due to 50% reduction in server CPU usage

Symantec Strategic Partner

Incit Technology

The University of Oxford

World's Oldest English-Speaking University Makes Major New Gains with Symantec™ Endpoint Management Upgrade

Over nine centuries the University of Oxford has grown to become one of the world's leading universities, with a complex collegiate and departmental structure supported by a central administration organization. Unlike in the past, its 22,000 students and 11,000 staff no longer just use books or manuscripts, but also make extensive use of IT in all its ever-evolving forms.

Ian Atkin is part of a five-person desktop administration team that services almost 3,000 endpoints spread across more than 50 sites that are used by around 2,500 staff in Oxford's central administrative sections and the Bodleian Libraries.

This means delivering over 100 software products to more than 30 types of PCs across numerous business groups. Critical to this service is the efficiency of the underlying IT processes, and any step that Ian and the team can make to improve these not only saves time and money, but also helps the University administrative staff do their job better. This in turn helps the University continue to deliver world-leading education and research.

To this end eight years ago, the team implemented Symantec Client Management Suite, powered by Altiris™ technology, as well as Symantec Helpdesk. This gave them many significant benefits as captured in this earlier case study. After the initial implementation, they continued to work on improving their processes and through subsequent customizations and bespoke add-ons reached the point where they could repackage, test and roll out a new software release in an incredibly short period of time.

"Business as usual here is that we typically engage in around six package rollouts each month, a figure which project work can double," comments Ian. "Unfortunately, many vendors' patch packages don't simply patch the product but also install additional unwanted applications or make undesirable configuration changes. So we have to repackage these prior to delivering them via the standard software delivery mechanism. This process used to be fairly time-consuming, but by automating as much as possible we reached a point where the time spent leveraging the technology had just stopped being a pain-point in our patch cycle."

> "With Symantec Client Management Suite, we can now see the status of software rollouts in seconds. In the prior environment, we had to create and run an individual SQL report for each rollout. The new compliance approach not only takes less than a tenth of the time to configure, it also provides better quality targeting data. The end result is that our software targeting is now far more accurate."

—Ian Atkin
Altiris Infrastructure Manager
Oxford University

The need for change is constant

However, the system, based on the Symantec 6.X management platform, was designed to manage Windows XP-based systems and in April 2014, Microsoft stopped supporting XP. This meant that not only was there a need to migrate all endpoints to a newer OS version, in this case Windows 7, but also to consider migration of the management platform to the newer version, to better support the new client environment.

Ultimately, the team decided that the migration to new Symantec platform was the right way to go, not only because they felt confident that the latest version would deliver without issue, but because it was clear Symantec™ Client Management Suite provided a range of capabilities and flexibility that still far exceeded those offered by the competitors.

Delivering the migration

The challenge was to deliver the migration in conjunction with and as part of the Windows 7 migration. "Timescales were tight, and there was no room for hiccups," Ian comments. So to help them through this they turned to Incit Technology and the expertise they offered.

"I've used many of the competing management solutions," says Steve Massie, owner of Incit Technology, a Symantec Silver Partner and long standing Endpoint Management Specialist, who has worked with Oxford for over 10 years. "The range of tools and capabilities that Symantec Client Management Suite offers far outstrip those of the other solutions. Something that takes an hour with other solutions can be done in 10 minutes using Symantec because you're not forced into a particular way of doing things."

"The most important thing was that the new management platform had to deliver the moment a migrated Windows 7 client was transferred to it from the previous platform," Steve comments, "While we lost a bit of the advanced automation that had been implemented in the 6.X platform, we understood the process and knew that what was there worked. We therefore knew it would continue to work."

By keeping it simple, sticking with the tried and tested, and avoiding the known pitfalls, Steve ensured that Ian and the team were able to move to the system quickly and confidently, and that each of the clients transferred across to new system without any issues, to the point that end users weren't even aware of the change.

"We had very little time to do any proper testing prior to implementation", says Ian. "The platform upgrade was a critical part of the much larger OS migration project, so it was a relief that nothing went wrong and considerable credit must go to our partner for this, who understood our situation and gave us a 'golden path' for our implementation. Incit frankly did most of the heavy lifting for the rollout and made us look good."'

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Discovering the benefits

Ian and his team have now started to test the performance of the new platform and to try out some of the new functionality with a view to enhancing their processes. They've been very pleased with what they have found. The most exciting capability they have discovered to date is the compliance capabilities within the software management and delivery toolset. The ability to define rules to test whether a piece of software is installed and to report and act on this instantly has been of huge benefit.

"We can now see the status of software rollouts in seconds," says Ian. "In the prior environment, we had to create and run an individual SQL report for each rollout, interpret the results, and then create custom SQL queries to target our install base. A downside in this approach was that targets were sometimes chosen incorrectly—after all they were created using inventory data which could be over a day old. The new compliance approach not only takes less than a tenth of the time to configure, it also provides better quality targeting data as it's leverages near real-time inventory data. Further, as compliance checks are executed on the client we can run them aggressively without incurring excessive server load. The end result is that our software targeting is now far more accurate."

Another area that has impressed is the new console interface, which is considerably faster than the previous version, and which provides much better functionality.

Says Ian: "We provide console access to all our IT technicians as it provides invaluable information about client systems which they can use to diagnose issues and make action decisions. The new console enables them to home in on information quickly and easily through the sophisticated but simple filtering capabilities."

The filters that can be saved for future use, Ian adds. Before this, he and his team would have needed to write special SQL queries to obtain this type of information.

In addition, the team implemented the Server Monitoring solution, with the assistance of Incit Technology, to monitor their server infrastructure. It is not a well-known fact, but Symantec has an excellent monitoring product, Steve notes, and when the Oxford team's previous vendor solution expired, they turned to the Symantec solution.

What has particularly impressed is the sophistication of the toolset. Most solutions could check whether a service was running, but few could determine whether the service was hung and therefore actually working. With Server Monitoring Solution, Ian has been able to develop monitors that actually test performance of critical processes as well as monitor the more normal functions like CPU usage. "We can now save at least two critical outages a year we wouldn't have been able to previously, with potentially significant cost savings," Ian comments.

Finally, Ian has been impressed by the performance of the new management platform. "I was expecting this to be even more demanding on computing resource than the 6.X platform," he says. "However, we found that demands on CPU were almost half of those required by the previous version. And we are also finding far fewer errors generated in the logs than previously. In short, this is a very stable and resource efficient product which means we haven't needed to invest in any special hardware or computing requirements and can run this on resilient virtual platforms."

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Achieving savings

While all of the above benefits are providing cost savings—for example, the team avoids GB£10,000 (US$16,400) in server costs, and saves an estimated GB£12,000 (US$19,600) each year in staff time by not having to create bespoke reports and queries—the most significant savings are from the improved quality of service delivered to end users.

For more information

Contact your local Symantec Sales Representative or Business Partner, or please visit: www.symantec.com/endpoint-management.

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