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Faronics Deep Freeze and Dufferin–Peel Catholic District School Board

CASE STUDY

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Situation

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is one of largest and most diverse school districts in Ontario, with 141 Catholic schools (118 elementary and 23 secondary) throughout Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon and Dufferin County. The current student enrolment is approximately 88,000 students, with over 56,000 in the elementary schools, and about 32,000 in the secondary schools.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board's computing environment is extensive, with a total of 8,000 workstations and over 100 servers. Over half of the PC's run Windows XP, with the balance running Windows 2000. There are even a number of Mac computers for specialized situations. These workstations are all managed by 14 First Level IT personnel.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board uses structured computing policies to handle much of their computing environments. Although the policies work well for most applications, they fall short when trying to manage unstructured computing environments where user requirements change on a daily basis. Examples of such environments are Dufferin-Peel's secondary, adult-education, and English as a Second Language (ESL) computer labs, which are also host to the federal government's Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program. Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board was struggling to keep these computers operational, and needed a more reliable solution.

Problem

Dufferin-Peel initially hired former students to repair their unstructured computers through the use of ghost imaging technology. Later, this task was outsourced to third-party IT support companies that were not affiliated with the board. This was a time-consuming practice, since imaging technology requires administrative initiation and system downtime. Also, since non-board personnel were performing these tasks rather than the board's own IT staff, there were problems such as poor record-keeping and the creation of several ad hoc images. The district decided to solve this problem by arranging to provide the services of one of its own recently hired senior IT staff members to manage these computers. Keith Sherk was entrusted by Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board to be the Micro Support Specialist and Third Level Technical Support professional for the secondary schools, and to take charge of the adult-education, ESL and LINC computers.

When Keith began work on the situation at Dufferin-Peel in the Continuing Education area, he found several problems. Many of the computers were missing images; in fact, 6 out of 10 computer types were missing images. "I often had to start from scratch to repair many of the labs," said Mr. Sherk. "That's one of the problems when you join an organization and have to maintain the infrastructure that someone else built." Ghosting didn't help much either since each lab had different needs, which resulted in Keith deploying a base image, then customizing the workstations individually to suit the lab needs. Keith was becoming increasingly frustrated with the fact that ad hoc machine repairs sometimes took over half a day, and that he never knew what to expect when he walked into a lab.

Solution

When Keith was shown Deep Freeze by a colleague, he initially had some reservations regarding how Deep Freeze could be used in his computing environment. However, he quickly became a Deep Freeze advocate once he saw how well Deep Freeze worked. "One of the labs that I manage has 30 computers,"

says Mr. Sherk. “I remember when we first set that lab up for adult learning and LINC classes, the students were clearly told not to install any software; just use what is already there. I took a look at two of the workstations in that lab the next day and found one workstation had programs in 27 different languages installed on it, and the other had programs in 24 different languages installed. I realized that this was going to be a constant problem in this lab, so it was one of the first computer labs I deployed Deep Freeze into. Ever since Deep Freeze was installed, I’ve never had to worry about that lab again.”

Deep Freeze enabled Keith to be able to protect a workstation’s operating system and software without restricting student access. With every system restart, Deep Freeze resets the computer to its original state - right down to the last byte. Keith’s computing environments are now easier to manage, and Dufferin-Peel’s expensive computer assets are kept running at 100% capacity with workstations that enjoy full immunity from software misconfigurations, viruses, malware, and spyware.

Keith even made Deep Freeze a part of his workstation images. “I can walk in and out of a lab in less than an hour,” says Keith. “I even use the Server Service Manager to control my Deep Freeze deployments in multiple facilities from one central location.” Keith is currently controlling one local network and three, soon to be eight, off-site facilities with full control over the networks from one location.

Evaluation

There are currently several thousand students who use computers that are under the protection of Faronics Deep Freeze, and everyone is happy with the benefits they have received. Keith is pleased since he no longer needs to worry about workstation downtime; in fact, the only time he needs to visit these labs is when there is a hardware failure or when a newly constructed image needs to be installed. Not having to constantly worry about mundane computer repairs leaves Keith free to concentrate on more important issues such as improving the school’s computing infrastructure and computing experience. The positive experience that Keith enjoyed from using Deep Freeze actually led Keith to sign up as a beta tester for future versions of Deep Freeze.

The adult education facility administrators and LINC teachers love the fact that their classrooms benefit from a clean and consistent computing experience. Students, too, appreciate the fact that when they sit down at a workstation they can count on it being functional and able to deliver a trouble-free computing experience. Today, Keith Sherk is one of Deep Freeze’s biggest fans, and recommends Deep Freeze to all of his colleagues.