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Faronics Deep Freeze Mac and La Mesa-Spring Valley School District

CASE STUDY

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Situation

La Mesa-Spring Valley School District is a K-8 district located in the East County of San Diego. The District serves 14,310 students housed in 18 elementary (K-5) and four middle schools (6-8). Certificated and classified employees number 1,550.

District-wide there are approximately 1,600 workstations running on a Novell core network. Though Windows workstations are used by administrative staff, Macs are used for educational purposes - students and teachers. The Macs mainly run OS 10.2.8 to 10.3.9 with any new hardware purchases having OS 10.4 (there are also some older machines still running OS 8 & 9, but these are slowly being phased out.)



La Mesa-Spring Valley School District has an annual budget of \$100,000,000 and an approximate student-to-computer ratio of 10:1 (on computers less than three years old.)

Problem

At the time that La Mesa-Spring Valley was transitioning to Mac OS X, the Information Systems (IS) staff realized that, though the operating system offered an environment that was more “kid-proof”, there were still general worries with regard students “explorations” and general OS integrity.

“Middle-schoolers are notoriously mischievous when it comes to computers,” said Richard Ribley, a Support Technician at La Mesa-Spring Valley. “They like to change things just because they can, whether that means taking items off the Dock, moving files to different locations or changing the toolbar in an application like Word. This would, of course, screw up the machine for the next person or even for the same person coming back to that machine later.”

Mr. Ribley and the La Mesa-Spring Valley IS staff found that the teachers often wouldn’t know how to rectify user-created difficulties or, if they did, would spend more time fixing the problems than teaching - a situation that didn’t work for either teacher or students. Generally, the teacher would end up calling the IS staff. With a staff of six and a schedule that meant that a staff member could only visit a school once every five days, a computer could easily be out of commission for a week.

“Our staff only has about six or seven hours a week to fix every technology-related problem in a school - without accounting for new implementations and the other IS tasks on our lists. At times we had some Macs remain in an unrepaired state for well over three weeks.”

Solution

In their preventative efforts, the IT staff implemented pop-up blocker software for Windows Explorer. When OS 8 and 9 were being utilized, La Mesa-Spring Valley utilized programs like On Guard (which they still use on their older systems) and Foolproof Security. With their transition to OS X, a security solution that worked with OS 10.2 (Jaguar) had to be implemented quickly or computer downtime and over-stretched staff would become an ongoing problem. Attempting to use Jaguar’s Simple Finder to curtail precocious users proved unworkable because this solution did not allow for a shortcut to the District’s Novell server and, therefore, students could not log in to their network accounts. There were no known OS X alternatives out there.

In early 2004, a colleague told Mr. Ribley about Deep Freeze from Faronics Technologies. Deep Freeze Mac (and its Windows counterpart) was evaluated over a two-month period and he immediately liked what he saw. There was an ongoing interest by the IS Department in any product that could provide a solution for OS X, and in anything that could improve on the problematic performance of Foolproof.

Once Mr. Ribley outlined the obvious benefits of using Deep Freeze as a solution, and other members of the staff had a chance to briefly test it for themselves, the decision was made to adopt it almost immediately.

“I sold the concept to the rest of the department, for both our Macs and our PCs,” said Mr. Ribley. “Once I was able to show how Deep Freeze could easily save us time and IS hours at a relatively low cost, it didn’t take long for management to see the program’s value. We had a desperate need for system integrity and Deep Freeze satisfied that need.”

“In the end, we could upgrade our Mac operating systems, protect them and continue to use our existing Novell network. Deep Freeze Mac made it possible to put OS X in our classrooms.”

Evaluation

“The difference that using Deep Freeze Mac made was huge,” said Mr. Ribley. “Immediately, we saw the amount of support time devoted to our Macs easily cut to 5% of what we had been spending prior to installing Deep Freeze. Deep Freeze eliminated 95% of all the software issues we were encountering so that almost the only difficulties we had were hardware-related.”

Not only has La Mesa-Spring Valley has been willing to change its use of Deep Freeze Mac as the program has developed over the last two years, but the District has also been integral in helping Deep Freeze Mac evolve. As early adopters of Deep Freeze Mac, Mr. Ribley’s experience was not without challenges, but he was happy with the quick progress that the program made.

“I was continually impressed by the responses that Faronics gave to my feedback. Sometimes it would seem like a suggestion that I had offered would appear in a new build within a few days. I don’t ordinarily get that.”

Originally, Deep Freeze Mac only restored user accounts while also offering some application and printer controls. While these features were useful in helping eliminate user-created difficulties, Mr. Ribley was ultimately pleased when Deep Freeze Mac 2.0 was released in late 2005. The program now offered full system restore upon each restart of the machine and protected his entire systems.

“The global restoration definitely worked better for us. The printer settings in the original version didn’t work quite as well as we would have liked. Version 2 eliminated these issues while offering complete system coverage, and I thought that was pretty cool!”

At present, La Mesa-Spring Valley uses Deep Freeze Mac 3 on both its newer Intel Macs as well as their older Power PCs. To allow users to save their data on a Frozen machine, Mr. Ribley initially creates a second, hidden partition on his Macs and maps over the users’ Documents or entire Home folders to that partition.

“Mapping over user folders works really well. The users don’t can’t tell the difference because they’re saving items just like they always have.”

Deep Freeze Mac continues to reduce the La Mesa-Spring Valley IS team’s workload by offering an easy solution that doesn’t require on-site management. Because of his great experience with Faronics and Deep Freeze Mac, the program has an enduring place at the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District.

“It’s great that I am now able to say ‘Just restart it!’ to a teacher having difficulties with a Mac,” said Mr. Ribley. “We’ll continue to use Deep Freeze for as long as we can.”