

Case study

St Andrews Catholic College enrolls AppSense to keep one step ahead of tech savvy students



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Damon Thompson,
ICT Manager



Challenges

- Secure and manage Citrix environment
- Minimize IT administration
- Proactively manage applications
- Enhance remote interaction
- Improve performance
- Reduce their overall IT costs

Solution

- AppSense Management Suite
- Remote management
- Server consolidation

Benefits

- 60% more users per server
- Pro-active application management and control
- Records executables
- Personal settings on mandatory profiles
- Speed, flexibility and predictability
- Reduced overall IT costs

Introduction

St Andrew's Catholic College opened in 2001 and now serves around 1300 staff and students, situated in the Redlynch Valley, Queensland (Australia). In a context of rapid societal change, St Andrew's Catholic College aims to provide its students with an education that will empower them to take their place in the world as spiritual, moral, well-integrated citizens, contributing positively to the life of the church and the wider society.

Background challenges

With 420 desktops running 120 applications and an ever increasing focus on IT in the curriculum, St Andrews wanted to simplify the management of its IT systems. The school investigated the options and decided to move all of its systems into a Citrix environment in order to enable centralized management of the IT infrastructure. The implementation went smoothly, however St Andrew's did have concerns regarding controlling application access in an environment where both staff and students now had the potential to tamper with mission critical functions.

Damon Thompson, ICT Manager, commented, “There were a few incidents where students worked out how to send network messages throughout the school to disrupt operations. We didn't just want to be able to respond quickly to these kinds of issues - we needed to be able to prevent them entirely.”

There were also other reasons to make application management within Citrix a priority.

“Around 90% of St Andrew's students own their own USB storage, any of which has the potential to bring damaging applications from students' homes and other external desktops to school with them. Although remarkably knowledgeable of the workings of a PC, we don't expect the students to always know or follow our processes of which applications they can and can't access on the school's network, or which of those have the potential to cause problems. Instead, we needed a system in place to monitor and control this for us.”

Aside from application management concerns, St Andrews also needed to improve the remote access user experience. Thompson commented

“The remote access feature of Citrix is excellent for our needs, with many of our staff and students logging in online from home to complete or mark assignments. We are also trying to encourage an 'online forum' culture to enhance student-teacher interaction. But when the logon times are slow and the session is unresponsive, it's very frustrating for the user.”

Looking for a way to manage application access, St Andrews turned to AppSense Application Manager.

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The introduction of AppSense

AppSense Application Manager works from the ground up, allowing IT managers to create their own list of ‘allowed’ or safe applications, automatically blocking unfamiliar applications and scripts.

Thompson highlights the benefits of pro-active application management for St Andrews, commenting “With other software, we would have had to wait for someone to run a bad program before we could identify and block it. This kind of reactive management is certainly not strong enough in a school environment where children are becoming increasingly technologically savvy and capable of tampering with the school’s network, causing disruptions and security issues.”

As AppSense Application Manager automatically blocks disallowed applications, the onus is taken off the IT staff, meaning application management is no longer part of their daily responsibility. Thompson noted,

“We no longer need to worry about students tampering with the school’s network to disrupt operations or downloading dangerous files from their USBs. Since AppSense monitors and automatically controls this activity, we are made aware of any threats very quickly, but we don’t have to waste time and resources trying to address the danger, because AppSense automatically takes care of it.”

AppSense keeps a record of when a forbidden script or application attempts to execute and who attempted to execute it and the device used, which has assisted St Andrew’s in preventing students from attempting to disrupt operations in the future. Thompson commented

“The great benefit for us is that AppSense will take a copy of any executable script someone tries to run. We have had students try to write malicious scripts to shut down servers and cause all sorts of disruption. Not only does AppSense prevent the script from being executed, but the records allow us to trace the person responsible. Even if they delete the script half a second later, their fingerprints are all over it. It’s the technology equivalent of a teacher having eyes in the back of their head!”

To address the problems associated with remote access, AppSense Environment Manager has reduced the size of user profiles to ensure they are small enough that users can still have a usable session over a dial-up or particularly slow connection from home. It has also allowed St Andrew’s to load personal settings on everyone’s profiles, ensuring that they are appropriate to that particular user - recognizing things like their preferred office and printer settings.

“Both staff and students regularly logon to the network remotely and AppSense made this experience fast, personalized, predictable and manageable. Previously, teachers had to drive in on the weekend to do reports, but now they can just logon in their own time and still work with a familiar interface.”

The ease of use of the remote logon has increased the adoption of online forums as a way to enhance student-teacher interaction. St Andrew’s has been so impressed with the technology that it now supplies remote access to smaller schools who do not have the resources to buy licenses for certain niche applications.

“We share the cost with them and allow these schools to logon to use St Andrew’s software and interact with our teachers, while maintaining complete control over the environment,” said Thompson.

Aside from control and functionality improvements associated with AppSense Application Manager, St Andrew’s are also using AppSense Performance Manager to realize unexpected benefits including dramatically improved use of server capacity and subsequent reduction of overall IT costs.

Thompson highlights the cost benefits, commenting, “We are now squeezing a lot more users onto each of our servers. Our servers were initially meant for 20-25 users, but with AppSense we have bumped this up considerably and now have the potential to accommodate for up to 60% more users on any one server.”

St Andrew’s has actually switched off a number of unused servers, saving space, energy and ultimately reducing running costs.

Thompson concludes: “AppSense not only met, but exceeded our expectations in addressing the school’s key challenges. AppSense works in the background to enhance our Citrix environment and ensure a manageable, predictable and responsive working environment.”

Network environment

- 12 Citrix Servers - mixture of physical and virtual servers
- Cisco-driven network infrastructure delivering gigabit to the desktop
- Extensive use of portable devices such as laptops accessing network resources over wireless
- Remote access for students and staff via Citrix Access Gateway
- Mixed-platform environment including Macs, PCs, mobile phones, laptops

About AppSense

We are the leading provider of user virtualization technology to enterprise organizations. User virtualization is a way of managing user-specific information independent of the desktop, and applying this information into any desktop (local install, virtualized, published, streamed etc) on-demand. This enables IT to standardize the desktop build, automate desktop and application delivery, and migrate users to new desktops – all while ensuring the user experience is seamless, personal, predictable and easily manageable.