

Case study

AppSense provides Surrey County Council with all-in-one solution to manage workforce and ensure government code compliance



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Girish Gorasia,
Principal Consultant, Desktops and Citrix,
Surrey County Council



Challenges

- Slow logon times at remote sites
- Application authorisation and control
- Resource management

Solution

- AppSense Management Suite
- AppSense Application Manager
- AppSense Performance Manager
- AppSense Environment Manager

Benefits

- Faster logon times at all sites
- Profile corruption eliminated
- Unauthorized applications restricted
- Compliance with GCSX Code of Compliance
- Maximise hardware investment with more users per server
- Consistent and predictable user experience

Introduction

Situated in the heart of South England in close proximity to London, Surrey County is the most densely populated shire county in England and is divided into 11 boroughs and districts. Surrey has a dynamic economy and a population of 1.06 million, and is highly regarded for its industrial structure and strong focus on knowledge-based industries.

Surrey County Council's local government organization employs 8,000 people who assume the administrative responsibilities for the region. The Council's IT department alone employs 160 people to manage its information infrastructure including the 450 servers, 6000 desktops and 1500 laptops the organization requires.

Background challenges

In 2008 Surrey County Council underwent an IT infrastructure overhaul to replace an aging and disparate legacy system built on PCs running Windows 2000. Surrey was looking to reduce its power requirements and costs as well as resolve performance issues at sites. With staff increasingly on the move it was also experiencing a growing need for users to be able to access their desktops remotely.

The old system was replaced with a Citrix XenApp farm, capable of delivering core applications to both thin and fat client platforms. Surrey's IT environment now consists of 150 Citrix XenApp servers, 150 Novell Netware servers and 150 Windows servers, with the organization running 500 thin client PCs using Citrix.

Girish Gorasia, Principal Consultant, Desktops and Citrix for Surrey County Council, explained, “We recognized that we needed to upgrade our desktop strategy and that the new centralised environment would be more cost effective. However, at the same time we needed to ensure application and resource management was suitably addressed and we were aware that using a single solution to address all of these issues was key in preventing IT management costs from escalating.”

“We also needed to control user application entitlement, ensuring that employees were not executing unauthorized applications that might destabilise the environment as well as taking full advantage of the investment by making sure we had the maximum number of users per server in the Citrix farm,”

Another challenge Gorasia identified was logon speed. “Surrey County Council has 300 sites, and at some of these sites the WAN is restrictive. We were keen to make sure users could logon quickly throughout this low-bandwidth WAN.”

The introduction of AppSense

Surrey County Council has been using two components of AppSense user virtualization technology, Performance Manager and Application Manager, since 2003 to entitlement as well as maximizing users per server. Identifying AppSense as the best solution to address its project goals and challenges in 2008, Surrey also introduced AppSense Environment Manager to complete the solution.

Gorasia explained, “AppSense had been providing us with an improved IT and user environment since 2003 so we knew it would be integral to the success of our upgraded desktop strategy. The comprehensive solution seamlessly builds on the Citrix application delivery infrastructure, which greatly simplifies and controls the IT management of our 8,000 users spread across 300 sites.”

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In a centrally administered user environment like Surrey’s, the use of unauthorized software is a primary factor in destabilizing user environments and the costs associated with rectifying a corrupt desktop can be significant. Furthermore, in the United Kingdom, local authorities are assessed against a policy called the GCSX Code of Connection (CoCo), a list of security controls which all authorities need to comply with before connecting to the shared extranet. One key aspect is to ensure unauthorized software cannot be executed.

“Surrey County Council maintains a relatively locked down IT environment, coupled with the need to comply with CoCo, it is absolutely essential employees receive only the applications they require. AppSense Application Manager provides us with high visibility into the entire user environment and automatically blocks unauthorized and unknown applications at the point of user access. This proactive nature of the solution means minimal admin, low desktop management costs and improved security - plus we stay compliant with the Government code,” said Gorasia.

Surrey also maximizes its hardware investment, enabling a significant increase in server capacity. By allocating CPU, Memory and Disk resource to applications and users as well as optimizing how user actions are processed, AppSense provides Surrey with a smoother, more responsive application set.

“AppSense manages our resources effectively, allowing more users on each of the Citrix XenApp servers. Plus, by optimizing our resources we have been able to reduce our power consumption, saving on costs and making us more environmentally friendly. Most importantly we can ensure predictable and reliable service levels for users.”

To address Surrey’s slow logon times, AppSense Environment Manager was utilized to minimise network bandwidth consumption. By saving and loading only relevant areas of a user’s profile at logon and logoff, rather than transferring the whole profile across the network, logon times were reduced and the risk of profile corruption decreased. Policy and personalization are applied to the environment as applications and operating system features are used, enabling Surrey to provide a consistent yet contextual experience for its end users.

“With AppSense, we can ensure that users working at sites where the WAN is stretched receive a consistent experience, logging on in seconds instead of minutes. Corrupt profiles which lead to employee down-time have disappeared completely, drastically reducing the amount of time we spend troubleshooting and rectifying roaming user profiles. With AppSense we deliver the security and performance benefits offered by mandatory profiles along with the flexibility offered by roaming profiles,” said Gorasia.

“AppSense just works. It’s always done the exact job we’ve wanted it to. The key benefit it brings to Surrey County Council end users is reduced logon time. For the IT department the main benefits have been its reporting capabilities - always having visibility over what’s in the environment, the removed potential for corrupt profiles, and enabling consistent quality of service across our 300 network sites,” said Gorasia.

Future plans

Surrey County Council is currently undertaking a long term project to place more of its applications onto the Citrix servers and increase its number of thin client devices from 500 to 4000 by October 2011.

Gorasia commented, “We plan to extend our use of AppSense to include license management, to simplify auditing and monitoring of our license use to reduce our application license numbers and therefore manage costs. There’s an enormous potential there that we just haven’t tapped into yet but plan to this year.”

Network environment

- 150 Novell Netware servers
- 150 Windows servers
- 150 Citrix Server Farm virtual servers
- 6000 desktops
- 1500 laptops
- 500 thin client PCs

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.