Creating and provisioning student accounts took a full three months. "It was a very time consuming process,"
Tommy Chanthasene, Network Manager for the district.

Illinois School District Reduces Student Account Creation from Months to Days Using DSRAZOR

Enhances Productivity, Reduces Costs and Redeploys Talent to More Critical Areas

Background:

Crystal Lake School District 47 faced a similar challenge every summer - one that represented a drain on resources and an unproductive use of time. Located in Crystal Lake, Illinois, the district was challenged, every school year, with creating and provisioning new accounts for 9,000 students at 12 schools. The job, which once required three months of the Network Administrator's time and a dedicated assistant to complete, is now accomplished within a matter of days.

By capitalizing on the strengths of Visual Click Software's DSRAZOR products for network management, the district has dramatically reduced the time and costs necessary to complete this task, enhancing the IT team's productivity and freeing up resources to address more critical activities.

Situation: An Unproductive Summer

When Tommy Chanthasene accepted the Network Manager position for Crystal Lake School District 47, he soon realized that, if he didn't take decisive action, his IT group would spend the summer months toiling on some unproductive activities.

The growing district, which encompasses 12 schools, needed to create and provision accounts for all of its 9,000 students every year. Each school had its own NetWare servers that host print and file services for students and staff.

The challenge during the summer months was to create new accounts for the new school year (which would be erased at the end of the school year). These accounts enable students to log in to the network so that they can take advantage of teaching applications, printing functions, and other valuable resources.

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"It's a real lifesaver," says Chanthasene. "Now it takes a day per school to modify the files and create the accounts. It went from three months of work to one day per school."

Unfortunately, this had proven to be a plodding, three-month endeavor that was costly and resource intensive. The Administrator who preceded Chanthasene had created and modified 80 batch files (at least six per school), using a NetWare import utility.

"It was a very time-consuming process," says Chanthasene. "It took about a month to merely create the batch files."

But that was just the first phase of the project. The district's IT Department then spent another month moving the accounts from each school into the batch files. This process was error-prone due to "fat fingers" and other challenges associated with such a tedious manual task. Because of the numerous errors, yet another month was required to review the accounts and correct any mistakes.

"We had until September to get the accounts created, and we used all that time," explains Chanthasene. "We would like to invest that time in maintenance projects and other activities that we consider more critical."

Action: Implementing DSRAZOR

Having dealt with similar challenges at his prior employer, DeVry University, Chanthasene quickly recognized that the district could enhance productivity by deploying DSRAZOR for eDirectory from Austin, TX-based Visual Click Software. He had experienced first-hand how DSRAZOR software automated and accelerated tasks, particularly activities that were previously managed using Novell's ConsoleOne.

Recognizing the opportunity, the district invested in DSRAZOR for eDirectory as well as DSRAZOR for Windows. In addition to its objective of handling the account creation process more productively, the IT group saw opportunities for enhancing its management of Microsoft Exchange and its forthcoming Windows platform. (The district is currently migrating to a Windows server platform to enhance total cost of ownership and ensure it has necessary support for the district's various applications.)

The new tools and capabilities provided by the DSRAZOR products enabled the IT team to efficiently import student records from its IBM AS/400 system. "With DSRAZOR, we rapidly export the student records we need and manipulate the file," says Chanthasene.

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Results: Reducing Account Creation from Months to Days

The results have been impressive. "Now it takes a day per school to modify the files and create the accounts," explains Chanthasene. "It went from three months of work to one day per school. We are no longer doing everything manually. We had the [DSRAZOR] applet do all the work to organize students on eDirectory."

In addition to eliminating months of work from the Network Manager's job, the new DSRAZOR tools enabled the IT group to redeploy one staffer who was previously dedicated to managing the 80 batch files. This IT professional now works in the curriculum area, addressing challenges of a higher level than batch file management.

"It's really a lifesaver," adds Chanthasene, with respect to DSRAZOR. "It's helping me to manage my time a lot more effectively. Three months in summer is too long to be focusing on creating accounts. Just that one factor alone has freed me up to focus on more critical aspects of my position."

The payoffs were clear and visible to the district's IT Director as well. "When he saw that the accounts were created in about two weeks, he was surprised," says Chanthasene. "He remembered the previous Administrator spending the whole summer maintaining batch files right up until school started."

One key factor contributing to these payoffs was the effective service and support that the district received from Visual Click. "The customer service and support have been excellent," adds Chanthasene. "They keep us informed of all the new updates and they are very knowledgeable. I'm extremely impressed."

While account creation and management have proven to be the most important uses for DSRAZOR for eDirectory, the district expects to continue benefiting from the Visual Click products in other ways.

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Future: Delegating Tasks to Enhance Performance

In the wake of the district's success with the account creation process, Chanthasene is now seeking other ways to capitalize on DSRAZOR's capabilities. One key opportunity revolves around delegating tasks to enhance overall IT effectiveness.

For instance, Chanthasene has used the DSRAZOR product to create applets that distribute his present job responsibilities. Now, he can hand off activities, such as password resets and account enablement/disablement. These activities can be performed by technical services professionals at the individual schools. Once again, this enables him to refocus his efforts and concentrate on higher order tasks that can have a greater impact on district operations.

In some cases, privileges might even be handed to teachers, enabling them to, for instance, redirect a print request to a different printer. Other activities – such as the remote control management of desktops – can be handed off to privileged techs. Considering that there are 3,000 workstations in the district, this can lead to considerable IT efficiencies and service improvements. "In the future, we would definitely like to take advantage of the ability to delegate other administrative tasks," he says.

While account creation and management have proven to be the most important uses for DSRAZOR for eDirectory, the district expects to continue benefiting from the Visual Click products in other ways. The IT team can use DSRAZOR, for instance, to identify inappropriate content on school servers, such as MP3s and movie files. The group also uses DSRAZOR for Windows to create MS Exchange accounts and mailboxes for staff.

And now that the IT group's summer is free to concentrate on high value tasks, they intend to take advantage of the opportunity. Next summer, the IT team will make the transition to the Windows platform for the entire district. That move should further contribute to the team's overall performance and cost effectiveness.

Given the district's experience, Chanthasene now recommends DSRAZOR to his peers in the educational field. "I would definitely recommend the product to other school districts," he says. "We are a very tight community and compare notes on the tools we use. We share ideas and best practices. This is something we definitely bring up when we get together."

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About Visual Click Software, Inc

Envisioned in 1996 and incorporated in 1999, Visual Click is the leader and pioneer in visually customizable computer network security access management and reporting applications.

Network Security Access Management: Our patented Visual Designer Technology allows for customer- specific applications to be developed in minutes rather than days, weeks or months. This powerful technology creates a new paradigm in network security access management. Previous technology either required use of overly large and complex 'consoles' that performed slowly and required product-specific training or required customized programming.

Our technology allows customers to create exactly what they need to control their network security access management without burdening the Administrator or requiring custom computer programming costs.

Network Security Reporting: Our patented Visual Designer Technology allows for customer-defined reports to be developed in minutes with very little training. This powerful technology allows the Network Administrator to focus on the important matters of securing a network. With minor customizations, each Network Security Report can simultaneously be used for Network Security Access Management. Each Network Security Report can also be used to change the Network Security issues it uncovers. This important technology solves two problems at the same time, namely, reporting about Network Security non-compliance and enforcing corporate Network Security policy.

Customer Benefits: Exceeding customer expectations is our number one goal. We know time is a resource that most IT professionals have in short supply. For this reason, our software is designed to reduce errors and minimize training costs, thereby freeing up valuable time to focus on more mission-critical tasks. From simplifying user management and maintaining regulatory compliance, to preparing for migration and delegating helpdesk duties, our software empowers our customers by saving them time and money associated with managing their networked environments.

"The customer service and support have been excellent," adds Chanthasene. "I'm very impressed."

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