
Redstor Case Study

Buckinghamshire ICT support team automates its support services with CentraStage

At A Glance

Line of Business

- The Buckinghamshire ICT Schools Team aims to ensure access to a range of universal services within schools as well as developing more targeted services to meet the specialist needs of individual schools.

Objectives

- As an ICT support team, Buckinghamshire ICT Schools Team needed to be able to manage all IT services remotely, monitor and manage individual devices and networks and pre-empt any potential IT issues.

Result

- Over 80 working days saved due to time and efficiency savings generated through automation. Reduced disruption for administrative staff, reduced IT downtime and lower IT risks, enabling schools to be more efficient and effective.



Challenges

The ICT Schools Team is responsible for managing Administration systems, networks and devices in most schools across the county and constantly strives to offer new and improved services to schools. Covering a large IT estate across such a sizeable geography was proving very difficult to manage and a strain on ICT staff and financial resources. The team began looking into technology solutions that could automate many of the routine, repetitive manual IT support tasks – the aim was to increase efficiency, automate routine processes, reduce ICT downtime in schools and eliminate unnecessary travel.

The team already had a remote support capability to computers in schools but had no centralised visibility and control of Admin PCs and servers. This meant IT support and maintenance tasks had to be carried out manually, one device or school at a time and would often require a site visit.

The ICT Schools Team had previously worked with Redstor, a disaster recovery, backup and managed service provider specialising in the education sector. Redstor had successfully implemented the Redstor Backup Service for Schools (RBUSS) within Buckinghamshire, which offers a fully automated online backup and recovery service that simplifies the management of backups. As part of Redstor's mission to introduce new and relevant technologies to its education service providers, affordable and simple device management was seen as a big issue in the Education sector and hence CentraStage was added to the Redstor portfolio and introduced to Buckinghamshire as a means to address this area.

Introduction

The Buckinghamshire ICT Schools Team has 230 schools with statistics showing that Buckinghamshire schools are amongst the best in the country, performing well above the national average.

The Buckinghamshire ICT Schools Team, is entirely self-funded. The services offered include dedicated IT support, training and development for Capita's School Information Management System (SIMS) and their fully managed ICT service known as BITES (Buckinghamshire IT Environment for Schools).

The support team also offers the Buckinghamshire Grid for Learning (broadband for schools), as well as Redstor's Backup Service for Schools (RBUSS), support for curriculum systems in primary schools and offer procurement support for most ICT requirements.

Solution

The main benefit of the CentraStage solution was the automation of previously manual IT tasks. This means the ICT Schools Team can focus its efforts on the work that is most important, resulting in scarce and expensive resources being used on the right task at the right time. With CentraStage software running on all Admin devices, the team can make use of the powerful inventory, deployment and device configuration capabilities.

CentraStage now manages the upgrades of SIMS servers with new releases from Capita. This removes the need for staff to log on to each SIMS server in turn, running SIMS Online Update Service (SOLUS) and checking the upgrade was completed. CentraStage automates this process, meaning SIMS upgrades can be rolled out automatically, saving considerable amounts of time, reducing downtime in schools during the working day and ensuring that schools are running the latest version of SIMS.

CentraStage also manages the SIMS server upgrades from SQL 2005 to SQL 2008 for the schools. These database upgrades used to be a time consuming and laborious task for the team to complete manually, even with a remote support capability. This upgrade has been so smooth that many schools have not even realized that the upgrade has been completed. CentraStage has fully automated the process allowing multiple servers to be upgraded simultaneously, resulting in a saving of 80 working days in total – time that can be reallocated to more appropriate, effective and beneficial tasks.

The CentraStage team also offers a patching service to protect devices automatically; this is a highly important task for ICT Schools Team staff. One example where patching proved to be vital was when the Conficker worm struck in 2008; the team was able to immediately identify which Admin devices did not have the requisite Microsoft security patch, and deploy the patch to all devices simultaneously, as well as ensuring anti-virus was up-to-date on all machines.

CentraStage has also allowed the team to comply with Becta and Audit policy for periodic password changes by consolidating passwords of administrator-level user accounts. Passwords can be changed regularly by running an automated task through the CentraStage platform allowing easier access to supported Admin systems.

The time and efficiency savings for the team due to CentraStage are significant and the benefits to the schools are equally as apparent with less disruption, less downtime and less risk, allowing staff to focus on teaching.

Ongoing Support

Steve Rowland, ICT Schools Manager, explains how CentraStage and Redstor enable his team to be more proactive: "CentraStage has enabled us to take control and proactively support our schools rather than the reactive support of the past. We have permanent visibility and control of all the devices we support and have been able to enhance and improve our SIMS upgrade service. We are now able to turn-around a SIMS.net or FMS update in a fraction of the time that it previously took."

"In addition, CentraStage provides us with a constantly updated device inventory allowing us to be proactive in advising our schools of their current and future hardware and software needs. Issues with MS service packs, hot-fixes, AV updates and more can now be easily spotted and dealt with in an efficient and effective manner. In summary, CentraStage has transformed our approach to supporting our customers and will give us excellent opportunities to further enhance our service in the future."

About CentraStage

CentraStage is a remote device management software technology designed for Education IT service providers, reducing the cost of ICT support in schools, allowing for the deployment of new services and simplifying the management and support of thousands of remote school devices. Functionality includes audit and monitoring, remote support, software deployment, device management and reporting.

About Redstor

Founded in 1998, Redstor is a Managed Services and IT Solutions Company focused around storage, data management and protection. Redstor has over 12 years of expertise in managing, supporting and monitoring data either on site, remotely or through its online storage and backup platform.

Redstor's Education division provides key services to the education sector which simplify the lives of their service partners. One of these services is the Redstor Backup Service for Schools (RBUSS) which is used by over 85 Local Authorities and Service Partners and over 12,000 schools in the UK. Redstor is also the CentraStage Education Distributor within the UK and to date over 20 Local Authority and Service Partners are using CentraStage to help simplify their device management and support.

Redstor is also acknowledged as being a market leader in the Enterprise Backup, Recovery and Archiving Space within the commercial sector with customers in Finance, Technology, Media, Public Sector, Education and Oil & Gas.

For more information please contact redstor on +44 (0)118 951 5200 or visit www.redstor.com

More information on CentraStage can be found at www.centrastage.com

