



Clackmannanshire Council

Viewpoint

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Graham Wilson
Head of IT



First rate teamwork...

Situated on the North side of the River Forth and dominated by the striking Ochil hills, Clackmannanshire Council is the smallest of Scotland’s unitary authorities, serving a population of over 48,000.

The inclusion of Wyse Winterm thin clients in its adoption of a thin computing infrastructure has enabled Clackmannanshire Council to effectively manage the total cost of ownership in achieving efficient desktop service delivery. It has achieved measurable cost savings in terms of infrastructure maintenance and support, whilst improving productivity among Council staff by replacing ageing and redundant desktop PCs with secure and reliable thin client devices.

Taking Action

Graham Wilson heads up the Council’s IT Services and is Interim Programme Manager for its ‘Customer First Team’. He explains: “The team co-ordinates a programme of modernisation and efficiency improvement in IT, Performance and Strategy and Business Change. In terms of IT we’re responsible for supporting 1150 corporate desktop users in more than 50 office locations and over 1500 desktops in 24 schools”. To deliver that IT support he has two development teams headed up by IT Technical Manager, Scott Carruthers.

Until the mid-nineties, Clackmannanshire’s IT infrastructure had evolved from a mainframe environment to an open distributed computing environment using Novell and desktop PCs running Windows 3.11. “The system wasn’t providing the level of service required and the cost of support to maintain the network was escalating.” says Carruthers.

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They suffered a number of problems. Varying versions of software on machines created a lack of flexibility, and support costs were high because support staff spent a lot of time having to visit offices to fix individual PCs. “To give an example”, he adds “our new Housing Management System required regular monthly upgrades. We initially tried to download them

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across the network, but with eighty users at several locations downloading 16-20Mb of upgrades it wasn't practical. Equally impractical was sending our support staff out to each PC and server to upload the upgrades from a CD." This arrangement was not only unacceptable to the users and support staff. It also threatened to adversely affect the Council's customer service delivery, from just one department!

A review of available technology led to the team choosing Citrix WinFrame as the basis for a pilot project in its Housing department. "We used Citrix on a Windows NT platform, with PC desktops running Windows 3.11" says Carruthers. "This enabled us to make a number of improvements, such as standardisation of the software on the desktops, greater flexibility in terms of centralised support and overall a better service to users." The pilot was successful and extended across the entire organisation, with Citrix MetaFrame being adopted in late 1997.

However, there remained an Achilles' heel. "Between 1997 and 2002 our desktop PCs were becoming increasingly uneconomic to repair, with replacement costs high" comments Carruthers. "Our support staff were having to make more and more visits to fix individuals' failing machines, during which time both they and the users were unable to work productively. Other big issues for us included having to provide the drivers for Windows 3.11 on each PC and also improving security levels. We were also spending a lot of time reconfiguring users' PCs."

Achieving Objectives

The team looked at various thin client products in the market and identified Wyse as the vendor that could supply a product to meet their needs. "All the users needed was a screen, keyboard and mouse and some sort of access device" says Carruthers.

Graham Wilson adds: "In choosing a vendor's product we not only considered the user needs but also the Council's commitment to the Environment. With so many users we wanted to use devices that had a low wattage and so a low electricity usage."

The team chose the Wyse Winterm 1200LE for its easy configuration, small footprint and low power consumption. In addition, the lack of moving parts promised greater longevity and reduced support and maintenance costs.

"The 1200LE is simple to use and costs very little to support" says Carruthers. "After initial rollout we continued to use the Wyse devices to replace our PCs as they became redundant. Apart from users who have a specific business case for a PC, approximately 55% of our users now have a Wyse Winterm thin client on their desktop. We expect that to increase to 80% over the next couple of years." In so doing, the team's strategy includes migrating to Windows 2003 at server level with Citrix MetaFrame XPe at the thin client.

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According to Graham Wilson, the Council's thin computing infrastructure has had a significantly positive affect on the management and delivery of its services. "Central management has obviously become a lot easier, and has reduced our maintenance costs by well over 20%. We expect it to reduce further as we extend our use of the Wyse desktops. But there's more to it than that." he adds. "The inclusion of Wyse Winterm devices has driven up users' productivity. Standardisation and central control of applications and configuration prevents any inappropriate software being brought onto the network. Users are able to stay focused on their jobs and are guaranteed of more reliable access to the applications they need. These include our Lotus Notes messaging system, Microsoft Office and other department-specific applications."

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Effectively managing the total cost of ownership on desktop service delivery is one of the most important objectives that have been realised in Clackmannanshire Council's adoption of thin computing. Graham Wilson concludes: "The technology has played an essential part in managing our TCO. Scott has talked about the costs of maintenance and support, and then there's the procurement cost of the devices themselves. The use of thin client technology in terms of the end-user Wyse Winterm devices and the Citrix environment, I believe, is one of the best ways of delivering that."

Conclusion

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