Virtue Technologies helps Holly Lodge High School improve their ICT access for students

Background

Holly Lodge High School College of Science is located in Smethwick in the West Midlands. With over 1,300 students in the 11-16 age group the school is in the first phase of Sandwell's Building Schools for the Future programme with a 'new' school due to be opened in 2010. This will provide the most up-to-date teaching and learning in a building fit for the 21st Century.

Common user experience

To ensure their students are able to maximise the potential of this new investment, the school was keen to provide a single point of entry for all ICT use, whether they were working in the classroom or at home, as Pete Chatwin from Holly Lodge explained.

"We have been able to take advantage of the central government scheme that provides free laptops to children and now some 300 of our student shave one. To ensure that accessing applications and work was as straightforward as possible we set out to provide the same experience for a student logging on at home or in the classroom. This way their desktop, data and network shares would be the same, irrespective of their location, making their access easier.

"We had looked at a number of suppliers and the technological solutions they offered, but were not impressed with either their understanding of the problem or their capability to provide a cost-effective solution. But eventually we were approached by Virtue who promised to help us find the right platform that would support our access requirements."

Investment in ICT offers schools' a cost-effective way of providing students with a rich and varied learning environment. In particular, improvements in technology have reduced the complexity and cost of delivering remote access to programmes and work for both students and staff when they are away from the school premises.

Virtue Technologies have many years experience of helping secondary schools successfully implement and manage complex ICT solutions. By working in partnership with the school they build a quality relationship that will help achieve ICT objectives.

Microsoft Terminal Services

Lee Widdowson, Account Manager at Virtue takes up the story. "Initially we looked at the Sun Secure Global Desktop platform, but this proved to be too costly. After further discussions with Pete we realised that their existing licensing arrangements already gave them access to Microsoft Terminal Services which would provide all the functionality they required."

Terminal Services Gateway (TS Gateway) allows authorised remote users to connect to resources on an internal private network, from any Internet-connected device. It uses Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) over HTTPS to establish a secure, encrypted connection

between remote users on the Internet and the internal network resources on which their applications and data reside. It provides many benefits, including:

- Enabling remote users to connect to internal network resources over the Internet, by using an encrypted connection, without needing to configure virtual private network (VPN) connections

- Providing a comprehensive security configuration model that enables access control to specific internal network resources

- Providing a point-to-point RDP connection, rather than allowing remote users access to all internal network resources

Enabling most remote users to connect to internal network resources that are hosted behind firewalls in private networks and across network address translators (NATs)

Platform for growth

To support this Virtue consultants configured and installed Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2006. This is an integrated network edge security gateway that helps protect IT environments from Internet-based threats while providing users fast and secure remote access to applications and data. The system went live late in 2009, but already Holly Lodge students are beginning to enjoy the benefits.

"The entire solution provides a greatly improved client

experience", said Pete. "We have been able to securely expose all the network resources through Terminal Services Gateway. This means that everything is the same for the students irrespective of where they log on. They enter the same user name and password and can save work and access the applications they need at home or at school."

Holly Lodge will be looking to increase the number of students who make use of this service during 2010 and Pete is sure that Virtue will be able to continue to support them as their requirements increase.

"I have been very impressed with Virtue right from our very first meeting", he concluded. "They demonstrated an understanding of our requirements and budget from the outset. They were then able to work with us to design and implement the solution.

"With an implementation of this size you expect some teething problems on initial implementation but as soon as we contacted Virtue they were able to resolve the problems quickly and remotely, ensuring that the inconvenience to us was minimised.

"I know that as we continue to grow and enhance the platform that Virtue have the skills and experience to provide us with all the support we need."

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