IT team earns an A+ for keeping 150,000 PCs updated

Chicago Public Schools met recently raised state requirements for mandated testing while saving time and effort with an easy-to-use PC image management tool

Since Microsoft officially ended its support for Windows XP in 2014, Chicago Public Schools, the third largest district in the U.S., had retained extended support for the long-standing operating system. But support was expensive, and Windows XP was one more PC image for the school system's five-person PC support team to manage across 150,000 Windows machines, many of which were 10 years old. That's not counting the 77,000 Chromebooks, 15,000 Macs and 76,000 iPads the team also must take care of. Then Systems Engineer Paul Valente got an email.

"We'd been under a constant push to get off our extended XP support, which was fueled by the district's original plan to administer the new state-selected assessment to only 10 percent of students," he recalls. "We thought at first that we could do that with the updated PCs we had, but then the state communicated that no less than 100 percent of the district's students had

to be tested using the new assessment, immediately increasing the scale of our challenge by a factor of 10."

Illinois state mandate's scope jumps 10 times in a day

Suddenly, the challenge facing Valente and his team members to ensure that enough PCs were compliant with the new requirements for the online testing platform, which had jumped by an order of magnitude.

"We needed to make sure the PCs that our students would need to use were completely functional and compatible with the online testing environment, like ensuring that Java worked and that our browsers were up to date," he explains, adding that the task included migrating 10,000 PCs still using Windows XP to Windows 7.

Enter Dell ImageAssist. It's a tool developed by Dell Configuration Services to help customers manage their various Windows images,

Business need
Keeping 150,000 PCs updated and user-ready for 400,000 students and 45,000 staff across 650 sites of Chicago Public Schools is a tall order for the district's five member IT team.

Solution
To meet a state testing mandate, the IT team updated 10,000 PCs to the latest Windows version in 75 percent less time than would be otherwise possible with an image management tool from Dell Configuration Services.

Benefits
- Keeps PCs up-to-date and users productive
- Helps school meet state testing mandates
- Cuts PC imaging time by 75 percent
- Reduces the number of disk images needed
- Simplifies user training
- Frees IT staff for other tasks

Solutions at a glance
- Client Deployment

"What once took hours to complete now takes about less than 30 minutes with Dell ImageAssist. And once I hand that image over to Dell, we can keep ordering all of our different Dell models."

Paul Valente, Systems Engineer, Chicago Public Schools

including applications and settings. "One of its big benefits is that we can use ImageAssist to manage the images across Dell's business PC platforms — OptiPlex desktops, Latitude laptops and Dell Precision workstations," Valente says. In addition, he even uses it for PCs of other makers.

About 85 percent of the district's computers are Windows PCs from Dell, with others from different sources. Of the Dell PCs, about 10 percent are Dell Precision workstations, and the rest are split between OptiPlex desktops and Latitude laptops. Valente describes those PCs as being networked and deployed just about everywhere across the school system's 650 sites: classrooms, labs, offices and other administrative facilities.

Taming the complexity monster

Without Dell ImageAssist, Valente thinks the job of updating all the PCs would have become monstrously complex. It also would have consumed enormous amounts of IT staff time. "We just directed on-site staff to reimage the PCs they have by turning them on and getting them online," he says. "Once connected, the PCs reimaged themselves, copying the needed image that we built with Dell ImageAssist. This saved people a ton of time and a lot of headaches."

As the school system's "Windows guy," Valente uses Dell ImageAssist to build PC disk images much more quickly than he did with his previous tools. For new Dell PCs that are slated for manufacturing, he uploads a completed image to Dell for loading in the factory. "This saves our IT staff weeks of time on the receiving end, because the PCs come already loaded with all the latest drivers on board, too," he says.

ImageAssist also saves Valente weeks on the front end when he's building a disk image. "I can build an image in a day or so using Dell ImageAssist, and then capture and send it off to the factory," he says. "That saves me at least 75 percent of the time it took me with the cumbersome and clunky interface of the tools I once used. And once I hand that image over to Dell, we can keep ordering all of our different Dell models without having to send an updated image when Dell releases a new version of one of those models."

"Like a gift from Santa"

"Simplicity" is a word that Valente often uses when discussing Dell ImageAssist. "With Dell ImageAssist, I was able to reduce the number of PC images I manage across the school system from 10 to 7, which has simplified my job,"

he says. "It's also simplified the jobs of support techs, who must reimage an average of 1,000 PCs a month, most often due to viruses or malware."

"We keep most of our data in the cloud, and Dell ImageAssist gives us a quick way to get a system to a common baseline for troubleshooting," he says. "What once took hours to complete now takes about less than 30 minutes with Dell ImageAssist. For techs, it takes just minutes to learn and saves so much time that they're now much more efficient and can focus on other work. For them, Dell ImageAssist has been like a gift from Santa."

Products & Services

Services

Dell Deployment Services

  - Dell ImageAssist

View all Dell case studies at Dell.com/CustomerStories