

Case Study



The Priory School Orpington, England

As a comprehensive school for teenage boys and girls, The Priory School in Orpington, England faced some unique IT management challenges. Among the most pressing was finding an efficient, easy-to-use deployment solution to help with very frequent reformatting and provisioning of hundreds of workstations. In selecting New Boundary Technologies' Prism Deploy®, distributed in the United Kingdom by NetWorld UK, The Priory School learned how fast and easy automated software deployment can be.

Background:

Located in the London borough of Bromley, The Priory School is an Extended School with Sports College status catering to boys and girls ages 11 through 19. With nearly 500 workstations and 11 servers in seven different campus buildings, the school's IT department faced a daunting challenge whenever a group of workstations had to be wiped clean and rebuilt. Their previous outsourced deployment solution was proprietary, extremely limited in its packaging, distribution, and reporting capabilities, slow and often unreliable.

Challenge:

Using its former deployment solution, The Priory School was only able to provision up to eight workstations at a time via a custom web-based interface using .msi installation package files. Not only was it slow, taking about 2 hours or longer to provision 8 workstations, the IT department had no way of knowing which applications had been deployed successfully on which PCs. There was another big problem with the solution as well – it wasn't very reliable, according to Graham Walters, IT Network Manager for The Priory School.

"Creating our .msi files was a real hit and miss affair. If the application was fairly straightforward, we would create the .msi in house. Quite often, because of the complexity of the application, we would have to send the software to our solution provider for them to create an .msi package for us. Sometimes it would take a number of weeks for a completed package to be returned to us. Occasionally our service provider was unable to create a suitable installation package for us, causing us the difficulty and hardship of having to manually install the software on nearly 500 computers."

Organization:

The Priory School
Orpington, England

Company Profile:

The Priory School is a comprehensive, coeducational Extended School with Sports College status located in the London borough of Bromley. With a faculty and staff of 150 and more than 1400 students, it faces unique IT management needs. The school previously used an outsourced deployment solution that was slow, inefficient, proprietary, and limited in functionality.

Solution:

Prism Deploy proved to be everything The Priory School's IT department needed, and much more. By automating its software deployment processes, the IT department greatly reduced its workload and achieved a nearly immediate return on its investment.

Quote:

"After only a few weeks of use, Prism Deploy is proving to be one of the most easy to use and efficient solutions I have ever experienced in more than 20 years of working in IT." – Graham Walters, IT Network Manager.

The problems didn't end there, either. With its outsourced solution, there was no way to take record of how many times a piece of software was installed. In the words of Graham Walters, "That made keeping track of software licenses for many of our applications a real nightmare."

Environment:

The Priory School's IT department manages a network of 492 workstations and 11 servers which are housed in the main school building and six additional satellite classroom buildings. The IT department leverages Windows 2003 Active Directory for its organizational structure. Under its Active Directory domain, there are four Organizational Units, which match up with the four standard workstation configurations in use: IT Admin, Office Staff, Student, and Teacher. Each of the four primary Organizational Units has additional OUs under it defining a classroom, department, or physical location within the school grounds. The IT staff also leverages Prism Deploy's dynamic Configuration Groups to automate tracking of installed software and any ad hoc deployment situations that arise.



Solution:

The Priory School's IT department had used the Prism Package Editor in previous years as an OEM component of a third party software product, so they were familiar with the quality and simplicity of New Boundary Technologies solutions. After trying a full evaluation version of Prism Deploy, the IT department was so impressed with its ease of use that they decided to end their search for an alternative solution immediately and go with Prism Deploy.

The Priory School has its Prism Deploy server components installed on one of its 11 servers, and dedicates one PC to creating and testing Prism Packages. It's a setup that works very well for the school.

"Our package building PC has just Windows XP with all current updates installed and nothing else. We start creating a package by restoring a ghosted base level image of our packaging PC, installing the software application, and creating the package," said Walters. "Then we restore the packaging PC using its ghosted image, deploy and test the package, then distribute it to the destination PCs out on the network."

Result:

As a result of automating its software distribution needs with Prism Deploy, The Priory School has realized amazing time and resource savings. Workstations that formerly took more than two hours to provision are now completed in less than 15 minutes, a mere fraction of the time, and the IT staff are no longer limited to building just 8 workstations at a time. That level of efficiency really paid off for the school in the summer of 2006. During the six-week summer break, the IT department had to reformat and provision every single one of the school's 492 workstations. According to Walters, "Using our previous solution, trying to rebuild all of our PCs in that time period would have been completely unrealistic."

With Prism Deploy, the school's IT staff now has the solution it needs to react quickly to changing needs and priorities. For example, if a new classroom gets added to the school's network, provisioning the new computers is as easy as creating a new Active Directory classroom Organizational Unit under the Student OU. All the required software is automatically installed to the workstations in the new classroom without any intervention by the IT staff or students.

"Because everything is automated and the solution is so easy to use, on a rollout project we're able to use temporary staff with limited software deployment experience and still get very close to 100 percent reliable installations," said Walters of Prism Deploy's many benefits. "We were actually able to improve the efficiency of our deployment process so much that we realized a full return on our Prism Deploy investment with our first big deployment project."

The Priory School IT department also realized significant benefits from Prism Deploy's robust reporting and automated Smart Update™ technology. According to Walters, it is now a very simple task to track the number of installations of a particular software application to maintain license compliance. The IT staff has also been able to dramatically reduce its workload from troubleshooting problems associated with inadvertent configuration changes.

"If a piece of software becomes corrupt or suddenly doesn't work as expected, we now just reformat and reinstall the software from scratch," said Walters. "Where it could take hours or days to research, diagnose and repair a configuration problem manually, in fifteen minutes or so we now can have a system up and running again. And because we know the software worked initially, we know it will work again. Prism Deploy gives us the confidence to know that it will work first time, every time."



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