Virtualised learning environment gives college educational advantage

Hopwood Hall College

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Ricoh implemented a virtualised learning environment at Hopwood Hall College which enables students to dynamically access information and collaborate interactively with teaching staff. In the new virtualised IT environment, any PC can be used to access any learning resource. The solution will save the college nearly £500,000 over three years.

A challenging IT environment

Hopwood Hall College, located on two campus sites just north of Manchester, offers a broad range of academic and vocational courses. Like many further education institutions, Hopwood Hall College has to fight hard to attract new students and sees its facilities, particularly IT, as features that set it apart from competitors.

But this has not always been the case. Just a few years ago, the college's IT infrastructure was antiquated, fit for a school rather than a further education environment, which is more demanding and requires greater levels of flexibility. For example, many PCs were nearly ten years old and struggled to run the latest applications. It could take students more than 30 minutes to log on to services related to their course work.

Implementing technological change

Simon Evans, Director of Technology and Innovation, was brought in to overhaul the college's IT infrastructure. Evans drew up a five-year plan, aimed at facilitating a highly advanced learning environment. This would be achieved by providing students with easy anywhere, anytime access to information, applications and services via a virtualised desktop IT environment.

Ricoh helped to plan and deploy the virtualised learning environment, rolling out more than 1,000 PCs and implementing a thin client virtualisation solution. In addition to the PCs, the college set up a new data centre with 21 blade servers, including five dedicated to storage. Evans was so impressed with Ricoh's service, he asked Ricoh to implement the server virtualisation.

Evans says, "I had not come across Ricoh ITS before, but from the first engagement, I was impressed. We discussed our vision and Ricoh came back with was a fantastic project plan. The Ricoh team has some of the best virtualisation experts I have come across. Even when they didn't know something, they had a solution within minutes from the wider Ricoh ITS organisation."

Objectives

- Compete with other schools and colleges
- Offer prospective students first-class learning facilities
- Modernise antiquated IT infrastructure
- Provide anytime/anywhere access to information

Results

- Virtualised learning environment
- Robust and resilient IT infrastructure
- ITIL compliant service and documentation
- Improved resource utilisation

Establishing a virtualised environment

The virtualised IT environment implemented by Ricoh supports the latest Windows operating system and Microsoft Office software. It provides fast and seamless access to the college's new virtual learning environment, enabling students to access information dynamically and collaborate interactively with other students and with teaching staff.

Ricoh's solution significantly improved IT resource availability without requiring significant additional investment in equipment. In the new virtualised IT environment, any PC can be used to access any learning resource. The college's IT capabilities are no longer tied exclusively to a particular classroom or department and can be used efficiently throughout the day to access a variety of subject resources.

Analysing the cost savings achieved by rationalising its IT resources, the college estimates that the Ricoh virtualisation solution will save nearly £500,000 over three years. The environmental benefits are also impressive - more efficient use of equipment and the consolidation of servers will cut energy consumption, reducing carbon emissions by 190 tons over the same period.

Delivering educational advantage

"At the start of our IT transformation journey, the Principal's overall vision for Hopwood Hall College was to become a 21st Century organisation and that was going to be achieved through technology access. Now, with Ricoh's help, we're in a position where one of the selling points in our prospectus is the provision of a first class IT infrastructure," says Evans.

"And the benefit for students is huge. We have many students who need expensive, business class software applications for their courses. Not only do they avoid the cost of having to buy the software themselves, the Ricoh virtualisation solution also means they can access it at anytime and from anywhere whether they use one of the college PCs, their own PC or laptop, a tablet or a smart phone."

According to Evans, Ricoh provided exceptional support, easing deployment and ensuring reliable performance. Evans says, "without Ricoh working day and night to build a resilient infrastructure we would not be where we are today. I can walk pass a classroom and see students using our technology, and knowing that every single one of those devices is working efficiently puts a smile on my face."

> " *The college made a massive investment in the virtualised desktop environment. The partnership with Ricoh was crucial in making it a success. Students really appreciate the technology because it gives them access to their files and applications 24/7, 365 days a year.*"
>
> John Spindler, Deputy Principal at Hopwood Hall College

Solution

- Ricoh IT Services
- Design and deploy virtual desktop environment
- Establish thin client solution
- Roll out PCs and support data centre servers

Benefits

- 21st century infrastructure
- More effective learning environment
- Easy anywhere, anytime access to information
- £500,000 3-year cost saving

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