

Microsoft Server Product Portfolio Customer Solution Case Study



Customer: Warwickshire Local Authority

Web Site: www.warwickshire.gov.uk

Number of Students: 78,000

Number of Staff: 5,000

Country or Region: United Kingdom

Industry: Education

Partners: Teksys and Sapphire

Customer Profile

Located in central England, Warwickshire Local Authority provides a fully-managed IT service to more than 5,000 workstations across 250 schools. This includes both software applications and IT support.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft Intelligent Application Gateway 2007
 - Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2006
- Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack for Software Assurance
 - Microsoft SoftGrid Application Virtualization
- Technologies
 - Active Directory

For more information about other Microsoft customer successes, please visit:
www.microsoft.com/resources/casestudies



Local Authority Improves ICT Services for Schools, Boosting Classroom Innovation

“SoftGrid has made our IT environment extremely flexible and saved us significant costs. Once an application has been sequenced it can be accessed by users anywhere in minutes.”

David Banton, Network Manager, Avon Valley School

Warwickshire Local Authority sought to improve its managed ICT service for schools by streamlining application delivery and improving security for remote access to school networks. Now, IT technicians are freed up to focus on delivering better support, and teachers can easily evaluate innovative new software on school computers with Microsoft® SoftGrid® Application Virtualization. Microsoft Intelligent Application Gateway 2007 helps to ensure security.

Business Needs

Local authorities in England play a vital role supporting national e-learning initiatives such as the “Harnessing Technology” e-Strategy and National Digital Infrastructure, which help educational authorities maximise their returns on IT investments. Warwickshire Local Authority is no exception. It is a leader in helping schools raise standards in teaching, learning, and school management, through the effective use of technology.

The local authority provides ICT services to more than 5,000 workstations across 250 schools in the county of Warwickshire in central England. It delivers software applications—including e-learning, Microsoft® Office suites and management information systems—and supports users with a team of advisory teachers and technical support

staff. The local authority wanted to improve its services for teachers, administrators and pupils still further to meet growing demand for IT innovation in local schools.

Historically, technicians performed software upgrades and installations during their regular visits to schools—typically during half a day every two weeks. But this meant that most of their time was taken up with routine work, instead of on developing new ways for teachers to integrate technology with their teaching.

What’s more, it was difficult for teachers to try out new software in their teaching. Chris Page, Technical Development Manager, Warwickshire Local Authority, says: “We were in a catch-22 situation. We wanted schools to have the flexibility to install their own software—but traditionally a managed

Microsoft®

workstation can stifle this. In addition, we needed greater control, because when a school installs a new application, it can cause problems when we deploy updates to our core suite of software.”

Finally, more school employees than ever need access to applications and files to carry out routine tasks. Page says: “In the past, only two or three people used school management information systems. Now, most teachers and administrators update marks and add notes to student records. At the same time, schools are highly concerned about data protection and computer security.”

Warwickshire Local Authority offers the Capita Schools Information Management System (SIMS) as one of its services. But SIMS is designed as a school-level application, and could not be easily accessed from outside the school.

The Local Authority wanted to strengthen its managed-service offering by:

- Streamlining application delivery to support innovative teaching.
- Simplifying upgrades and installations to free IT technicians’ time during school visits.
- Improving security and data protection.

Solution

In designing a solution, Warwickshire worked with Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Teksys and Microsoft Security Partner of the Year Sapphire. Together, the project team identified a solution that could build on Warwickshire’s existing framework—which includes Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2006 and Active Directory® service. The new solution comprises Microsoft Intelligent Application Gateway (IAG) 2007 and Microsoft SoftGrid® Application Virtualization, part of the Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack for Software Assurance. The authority was one of the first in the country to use these two applications to deliver “instant applications” and “SIMS anytime, anywhere”.

SoftGrid works by streaming applications to client computers. The applications are not

installed on user workstations, but can be used securely by users on demand, wherever they are. Now, due to SoftGrid, applications are available immediately from any computer.

David Banton, Network Manager, Avon Valley School says: “SoftGrid has made our IT environment extremely flexible and saved us significant costs. Once an application has been sequenced it can be accessed by users anywhere in minutes. SoftGrid has also allowed us to have more control over our licensing because we can limit how many users access an application.” What’s more, IT technicians and advisory teachers can demonstrate new specialist software to schools across the network, without having to install it on a local computer. “This makes it so much easier for teachers to try new software in the classroom,” said Richard Chapman, E-Learning Advisor.

IAG 2007 can define granular policy for which applications users can access from different locations such as schools, at home, and from anywhere by using a public Internet connection. The local authority can use IAG 2007 to offer users more flexible access without compromising security, and schools can implement permissions in addition to those set by the local authority. For example, teachers can log on from home to use SIMS in a way that meets a school’s data protection and privacy policies. “It’s so easy to log on from home and get to SIMS whenever I need to,” said Sandra Moreland, Administration Manager, Willows C of E Primary School.

In December 2006, SoftGrid experts Teksys and IAG 2007 specialist Sapphire deployed a successful proof of concept, and spent a further six weeks planning and deploying the solution across the county’s managed-service system. They worked with the local authority to establish the checks which computers connecting to the system would have to pass, which applications would be available and who required access to them.

Benefits

Warwickshire Local Authority can now deploy software updates and upgrades more quickly and offer better-quality services to its schools. Teachers can trial new software safely without affecting system stability, and can access management information systems securely.

- Faster, simpler deployments to school workstations. Previously, technicians would have to take a classroom out of use and disrupt lessons to deliver upgrades. Page says: “With SoftGrid, everything takes place in the background, without any disruption to school operations.”
- Better support and service to the schools, by freeing up IT technicians’ time. Page says: “The time savings are immense. Typically, a technician visits a school for half a day every two weeks to carry out support jobs—including upgrades and installations. We can now do this instantly by using SoftGrid, and my people can work on other tasks during their visits, and provide a higher-quality service to schools.”
- Schools free to innovate with new software. Teachers can use SoftGrid to use demonstration and beta versions of software safely, and advisory teachers can show new software to any school in the county they visit at the push of a button. Page says: “We can deploy trial or beta versions for a fixed period, knowing that it won’t affect our core applications, because it’s virtualised and kept separate from the other applications on the computer.”
- Increased security for schools. The local authority can use IAG 2007 to offer secure access for school staff in several ways to suit their preferences. Page says: “Instead of installing SIMS on teachers’ portable computers, we can give them access to the software across the network, by using IAG 2007. This way, we know the data remains in the school, and is only available to authorised staff from a computer which passes the security tests performed by the IAG 2007 Web client.”