



Windows Vista Customer Solution Case Study



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Education

Customer Profile

The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) provides adult-learning opportunities and business services through partnership with eight colleges and universities.

Business Situation

SVHEC wanted to stay current with the latest technology and also gain a more consistent and secure desktop computer environment.

Solution

The IT staff deployed the Windows Vista® operating system on 40 of the center's 225 desktop computers, preliminary to campuswide deployment.

Benefits

- Technology leadership improves services
- Estimated IT savings of more than U.S.\$30,000 annually
- Enhanced security helps safeguard desktops
- Ease-of-use features enhance productivity

Education Center Upgrades Software to Improve Service and Lower IT Costs

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Jeffery Webb, Chief Information Officer, Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center

The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) provides adult-learning opportunities to this rural corner of the state through partnership with eight colleges and universities. It also provides conference and business support services. Because SVHEC prides itself on being the technology epicenter for southwest Virginia, the IT staff deployed the Windows Vista® operating system on 40 computers, preliminary to upgrading all 225 desktop computers. With the move to Windows Vista, SVHEC is able to provide faculty, students, and partners with desktop computers that are more secure, more stable, and easier to use. The IT staff has reduced the time required to deploy new computers from two days to two hours, reduced desktop configuration and support work, and reclaimed the 200 hours spent annually on repairing malicious software problems, for a total annual savings of about U.S.\$30,000.

Situation

The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC), in Abingdon, Virginia, was established in 1991 to strengthen the economy of southwest Virginia by providing education and training for the current and future work force. Through a unique partnership with eight colleges and universities throughout the state, SVHEC provides undergraduate and graduate degree programs and professional development courses, primarily for adult learners. SVHEC also promotes regional economic development through its conference facility, business support services, and technology applications.

Many professors from the supporting schools, such as the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech, teach classes at SVHEC using videoconferencing technology and never set foot on the campus. Explains Jeffery Webb, Chief Information Officer of Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, "We try to be the focal point for new technology in our part of the state because much of our teaching is delivered using technology. We are not only a showcase for the latest technology, but we also need to offer our faculty, students, and business customers capable, reliable equipment for their classes and conferences."

SVHEC ran the Windows® XP operating system on its fleet of approximately 225 desktop and portable computers. However, as each new computer was added to the network, the small IT staff—some of whom are students—tended to deploy the software image slightly differently. "Over time, our desktops looked less and less alike, with a range of updates and configurations," says Jeremy Mitchell, IT Specialist at Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. "Our nonstandard desktop environment was time-consuming

to support and pulled our small staff away from more important things such as developing new solutions."

In addition, visiting professors, students, and staff frequently downloaded unauthorized software onto the computers, either for teaching purposes or personal use, which compromised the security of the SVHEC network. "It was too easy to bypass the safeguards in Windows XP, and we sometimes lost control over what people were installing on our desktop systems," Webb says. "We wanted to regain control of our desktops."

Solution

Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center worked with SyCom Technologies, a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner in Richmond, Virginia, to participate in the Windows Vista® Technology Adoption Program. "We like to be on the leading edge of technology, so we were eager to be an early adopter of the latest Windows operating system," Webb says.

SyCom deployed the Windows Vista operating system on 40 SVHEC desktop computers—21 in the center's administrative offices and 19 in a teaching laboratory. SyCom was able to build a single desktop image that contained all the required operating system settings, applications, and security software for all 40 computers.

"We didn't roll out Windows Vista to all classroom computers right away because professors and students weren't familiar with it and also because of hardware limitations of our older systems," says Jacob King, IT Specialist at SVHEC. "As we upgrade these older computers, we'll move them to Windows Vista, too." SyCom provides on-site faculty training to

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Jeffery Webb, Chief Information Officer,
Southwest Virginia Higher Education
Center

facilitate adoption of Windows Vista adoption.

SVHEC is taking advantage of new Windows Vista features to simplify desktop management and enhance security. With Windows User Account Control, Webb's team can give staff, visiting faculty, and students easy access to needed applications and lock them out of unauthorized applications. The IT staff also uses the expanded capabilities in the Active Directory® Group Policy feature to easily set desktop permissions for different university partners.

The SVHEC administrative staff appreciates ease-of-use features in Windows Vista, such as integrated search, the Windows Aero™ desktop experience, and the customizable Windows Sidebar. Users employ the search capability to quickly find and start needed applications and to locate information on the center's network.

Benefits

Because of its early move to Windows Vista, the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center has maintained its technology leadership, which has enabled it to better serve partner schools, students, faculty, and business customers. The IT staff has been able to reduce costs by taking advantage of deployment and management efficiencies. And end users have increased their productivity, thanks to improvements in the Windows Vista user interface.

Technology Leadership Improves Services

“The move to Windows Vista helps us better fulfill our mission to provide top-notch, technology-enabled educational opportunities to our constituents,” Webb

says. “We're able to provide better performance and stability for our videoconferencing capabilities, so we can deliver a better educational experience to our students and business customers. Also, because we're ahead of the technology curve, we're better able to help our business customers adopt Windows Vista in their own environments.”

SVHEC offers its Windows Vista-equipped teaching lab to business customers as a secure, customizable test lab where they can explore the operating system and test their own applications on Windows Vista.

SVHEC is also recommending Windows Vista to its partner schools. “We've had several opportunities to recommend Windows Vista to the IT staffs of supporting schools,” Webb says. “They are most interested in it because of the increased level of security and lower deployment costs.”

Estimated IT Savings of More than U.S.\$30,000 Annually

With its move to Windows Vista, SVHEC lowered operating costs by making its IT staff more efficient and productive. “With Windows Vista, we can lower our desktop support costs,” Webb says. “Instead of running around supporting desktops, our small staff is freed up to do more business-critical projects such as deploy new applications and train users. As users have moved to Windows Vista, our support calls have decreased. Based on what we've seen so far, we'll probably save half the cost of one tech-support person, who will be able to spend that time on network-related activities.”

Using Active Directory Group Policy, the IT staff is able to centrally customize the user permissions on classroom desktop computers for different professors. “Each

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of our university partners needs different applications running on their desktops, for the different courses they teach,” Mitchell says. “Now we can use Group Policy to configure precisely the software environment each professor wants, which saves us a huge amount of time and also gives us far tighter control over our desktop systems.”

Further time savings come from more efficient deployment of new computers. “We used to spend one to two days each semester reconfiguring machines in each teaching lab,” King says. “That’s been reduced to two to three hours with Windows Vista.”

Adds Webb, “Each year, probably 25 percent of our computers would get infected with malicious software. It took anywhere from an hour to four hours to fix each one. We expect to eliminate this time drain completely, which is an approximately 200-hour annual time savings, worth \$4,000. From a combination of support, configuration, deployment, and security efficiencies, we estimate that we’ll be able to save about \$30,000 annually by moving to Windows Vista.”

Enhanced Security Helps Safeguard Desktops

SVHEC has been able to strengthen the security of its desktop computers by using the security improvements in Windows Vista, which better safeguards data and provides a more stable computing environment. “Detection of unwanted software is built into the operating system, which means that users aren’t interrupted by malicious software that can destroy our systems,” Mitchell says.

“Windows Vista prompts users for permission when they try to install

software, which cuts down on students and faculty installing freeware on our PCs,” King says. “The operating system is smart enough to know what software users are trying to install and restricts them according to the rules we’ve set. It relieves us of constant watchdog duty.”

Ease-of-Use Features Enhance Productivity

SVHEC staff like the more modern look of Windows Vista, the better file indexing, and the built-in search capability. “Our users have a tendency to dump files on the network file server computers and forget about them,” Webb says. “We believe that the new indexing feature of Windows Vista will make it easier for users to organize their files more logically and find the files later. This will cut down on the need to re-create content.”

Users also like Windows Sidebar, which is a handy and more secure way to run small applications, such as weather reporting, that users reference daily. “These little programs tend to be unreliable and drag unwanted software into the desktop,” Webb says. “Through gadgets for Windows Sidebar, Windows Vista provides a nice way to keep those applications at hand without endangering security.”

Webb concludes, “I’d say that we’ll experience a 10 to 15 percent boost in user productivity, from a combination of better security, faster search, and the more attractive interface.”

For More Information

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For more information about Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center products and services, call (276) 619-4300 or visit the Web site at: www.swcenter.edu

Windows Vista

Windows Vista can help your organization use information technology to gain a competitive advantage in today's new world of work. Your people will be able to find and use information more effectively. You will be able to support your mobile work force with better access to shared data and collaboration tools. And your IT staff will have better tools and technologies to enhance corporate IT security, data protection, and more efficient deployment and management.

For more information about Windows Vista, go to:

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