

Education Sector

FIM 2010 provides cost effective Identity and Access Management solution for schools

Customer Profile



Founded in 1986, Dell creates, enhances and integrates technology and services and provides system management solutions for customers of all sizes and system complexity.

Business Problem

As part of its Building Schools for the Future contract in the UK to provide ICT services to schools across Derbyshire, Dell required a sophisticated Identity and Access Management (IAM) system to automate the provisioning and de-provisioning process of user accounts and roles at each school.

Solution

An IAM solution based on Microsoft Forefront Identity Manager (FIM) 2010.

Benefits

- Streamlined processes
- Reduced administration
- Improved security and compliance
- Reduced support costs

Client Background

Since the first Dell PC was introduced in 1986, the company has continued to shape the IT industry by pioneering critical developments in home, small business, enterprise computing and IT services. At the heart of Dell's innovative approach is a commitment to deliver new and better solutions that directly address customer needs. To this end, Dell became proactively involved in the UK government's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) program by applying its world class systems integration expertise.



The Business Problem

Information Communications Technology (ICT) plays an integral role in educational establishments. Today's students are growing up in a digital age where technology is not only used for management and administration purposes, but is increasingly becoming integrated into the delivery of curriculums. Since its inception, Dell was involved as a sub-supplier in the BSF program, providing hardware for 19 contracts across the country. In 2008 Dell decided it could add more value as a prime supplier, delivering new ICT education solutions to schools.

One of the contracts Dell was awarded involved providing ICT solutions to schools across Derbyshire. The respective Local Education Authorities awarded Dell the contracts based on its ability to design, build and manage sophisticated ICT solutions that addressed the challenges and end-to-end needs of today's schools.

Dee Chury, Head of UK Public Sector for Dell IT Consulting, explains Dell's commitment, "Our aim is to provide solutions that really make a difference in the education space. To this end we have been heavily involved in various

Education Sector

education symposiums and forums to gain a better understanding of staffs' IT related frustrations and educational targets. That way we can offer technologies and solutions that really add value and deliver opportunities for schools."

Feedback received from teachers and administrators made Dell aware that whilst the value of ICT in the education space was recognized, it could often cause an additional burden for staff. A key challenge for most schools was how to manage their IT accounts and control access to information and resources. Not only do schools have a huge influx of new pupils each year, but as each student enters a new key stage, they require access to new systems, applications and resources. Manually provisioning and de-provisioning accounts to ensure everyone has appropriate access at the right time is a huge administrative task and a very costly overhead for schools, or as in this case, for the ICT managed service provider which is Dell.

Dell discovered that the process for providing new teachers with access to the correct accounts and resources was overly complicated and time consuming. When a new member of staff joined a school, an administrator would have to create their accounts and manually provision access to the appropriate resources. If that teacher then looked through the catalogue of special interest groups and decided they wanted access to a new group, they would have to find out who owned the group and send an authorization request. Someone would then have to manually set up the required access. Any changes to a user's data would have to be manually duplicated across all systems. The process was not only extremely time consuming, it was impacting on staff and pupils' productivity.

Dee Chury added, "We became aware of two main challenges around Identity and Access Management (IAM) in schools. The first was how to ensure staff and pupils had timely and appropriate access to the right resources and the second concerned security. In the case of students, we are mostly dealing with minors. This means security measures surrounding personal data need to be extremely stringent. We wanted to offer the schools a highly sophisticated, yet flexible IAM solution to relieve the administrative burden and improve the management and control of access rights."

Dell's commitment to providing solutions that add value and deliver flexibility meant it required an Identity and Access Management product that offered flexibility, choice and long-term value. Dee Chury explains what Dell was looking for in an IAM solution, "We didn't want to use an off-the-shelf proprietary education solution because we didn't want the schools to be at the mercy of a niche software vendor with a closed product. Neither did we want to deliver a solution that would dictate what technologies a school could use, now or in the future. We wanted to offer flexibility and choice and were therefore looking for a product that could integrate with multiple systems."

Dell also wanted to offer the Local Education Authority (LEA) a solution that could be rolled out to schools across Derbyshire at very low cost. The county had six schools that had secured BFS funding, but Dell's vision was to create an IAM solution that the 40 plus secondary schools could capitalize on without significant investment.

The Solution

Dell selected Microsoft Forefront Identity Manager 2010 (FIM 2010), a product that delivers policy-based identity and credential management across heterogeneous environments. "The schools had two main systems that the IAM solution would need to integrate with initially, the Management Information System (MIS) and the Virtual Learning Environment. The fact that FIM 2010 can integrate with a variety of systems meant we didn't have to dictate which technologies a school could use, which was a compelling reason for selecting the Microsoft product," explains Dee Chury. He added, "Another reason was Microsoft offers extremely good value to the education sector. The licensing costs are very attractive to schools with tight budget constraints."



Education Sector

Once Dell had developed the architecture blueprint, and on Microsoft's recommendation, Dell chose to work with Oxford Computer Group (OCG) to implement the IAM solution. OCG is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner that specializes in meeting the identity and security needs of enterprise organizations. Dee Chury explains, "We wanted to bring in additional subject matter expertise and OCG came highly recommended by Microsoft - and they didn't disappoint us. They're experts in the field of IAM and their knowledge of FIM 2010 and what it can achieve is outstanding."

Dell and OCG set about working with Derbyshire's LEA. Two schools were to be brought into Dell's ICT contract in November 2010. Dee explains that despite its late involvement in the project, OCG's expertise meant the go-live deadline was not missed, "We had an extremely tight timeframe and engaged OCG relatively late on in the project. Their consultants were extremely responsive and quickly got to grips with what was needed. They were also very flexible and this, together with their expertise meant that the first two schools went live on time."

FIM 2010 takes information from each school's MIS system and automatically provisions and de-provisions user accounts and access rights by synchronizing the data across systems. It also provides delegated administration facilities that enable staff and pupils to perform management tasks, such as re-setting their own passwords and requesting access to new resources and groups. OCG designed, architected and implemented the IAM solution for Derbyshire LEA and in 2011 began working with Dell on the delivery of another of Dell's contracts.

Dee explains how the new solution has streamlined the provisioning process, "FIM will automatically pick up any changes or additions to a school's MIS system. That means if a new member of staff is added to MIS, FIM will create a user account in Active Directory, a mailbox in Exchange, enable them for Lync, as well as appropriate access rights according to their role. The process is automated, it requires no manual intervention, it's fast and it provides the member of staff with instant access. It ticks all the boxes."

Because the education sector's MIS system is a dynamic piece of software, and is constantly being updated according to government requirements, OCG brought on board Group Call, a sub contractor specializing in the extraction of information from MIS. Using Group Call's specialist data extraction tool, OCG was able to ensure that any changes made to a school's MIS system would not affect FIM's functionality.

Dee Chury was clearly delighted with the way the partnership between OCG and Group Call worked. He says, "OCG and Dell had both been talking to Group Call and it made perfect sense for OCG to sub contract this specialism to them. The partnership works seamlessly as far as we are concerned."

Sadly the UK's new government has now abolished the BSF program, but as Dee explains, now that the IAM solution has been installed in two counties under a Dell managed service, it is still a very viable and cost effective solution for the remaining schools that had not secured BSF funding prior to the abolition of the program. "The bulk of the investment went into designing the solution and getting the first schools on board. For schools without access to BSF funding the platform offers a far more sophisticated Identity and Access Management solution than they could realistically afford if they were building it themselves as a stand-alone solution. All the leg work has been done, which makes roll-out relatively simple, as we've proved when we rolled it out to a third school at the start of the year, so we're optimistic that the solution is something the remaining schools in both counties can benefit from at very low cost," says Dee.



Education Sector

The Benefits

Streamlined processes

With the implementation of FIM 2010, the process for provisioning and de-provisioning users has been automated and streamlined. Teachers and pupils now have instant access to information and resources, which will have a positive effect on productivity. Additionally FIM's self-service portal provides a simple interface that allows users to update their personal details and manage their own access requests without the intervention of a helpdesk.

Reduced administration

Keeping an entire school's ICT user's data and access rights up-to-date and synchronized across all systems is a huge administrative task that often requires a team of dedicated administrators. With the IAM solution in place the schools can be confident that any changes they make to the MIS system will be automatically picked up by FIM 2010. This means that accounts are not only automatically provisioned and de-provisioned, but requests and changes made via the self-service portal are automatically synchronized across all systems.

Dee Chury adds, "The impact the new system will have on a school's administrative resources is quite significant. Because the entire access management process is automated and requires no manual intervention, administration resources can be released to work on other tasks."

Improved security and compliance

The solution provides the schools across both counties with a robust system for managing and maintaining control over who has access to their systems and data. The automated de-provisioning process ensures if anyone is taken off the MIS system, their access rights are immediately put on hold. This means schools can be absolutely confident that only those users with authorized permission can gain access to the school's systems and resources.

Reduced support costs

FIM's self-service portal facility provides staff and pupils with a simple process by which they can manage their own information, reset passwords and request access to resources and groups without intervention from a helpdesk. The product's automated workflow processes means requests are either automatically granted or forwarded to the list owner for approval. This has enabled Dell to reduce its support costs and focus on providing more proactive services that add value to the schools.



Closing remarks

Dee Chury concludes, "OCG's knowledge of FIM 2010 combined with Dell's experience in the education sector has enabled us to deliver a highly sophisticated IAM solution that addresses all the concerns and challenges raised by schools regarding access management. Dell is delighted with the solution as it enables us to offer a highly cost effective IAM system that would otherwise have been completely inaccessible to schools across Derbyshire."

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Oxford Computer Group (OCG) is an IT service company that specializes in Identity and Security with a particular focus on Identity and Access Management (IAM) and Information Protection. With 600+ enterprise projects completed and more than 6000 people trained on Microsoft identity and security technologies we have a wealth of expertise, solution components and training courses to offer. Operating from offices in the US, UK, BeNeLux and Germany, OCG is a Microsoft Gold Partner with Identity and Security Solutions, and Learning Solutions competencies. We understand identity and security – benefit from our experience and capability

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