

St. Agnes Academy



Delivering Education On Demand with Payback in Four Months using an Application Streaming Solution from Symantec

The 830 students at St. Agnes Academy had laptops that needed provisioning, overwhelming a small IT team, reducing instructional time, and creating challenges in license management. The school turned to Symantec for an Altiris solution that streams applications on demand and manages licenses centrally. Results include a 40 percent reduction in help desk tickets, two to five days reclaimed in instructional time per class, and 100 percent payback in four months.

What's the girl carrying?

If a St. Agnes Academy student from 1906—the year the all-girls school was founded—could walk around the Houston, Texas campus today, she'd be stunned. The Dominican nuns serving as teachers would be a familiar sight. But all of today's students are carrying and using laptop computers, wirelessly connected with school servers.

What's more, this is not new. It's been a tradition since 2001, when the school became one of the first in the Houston area to adopt a one-to-one program.

Here's how it works: Every incoming freshman buys her own laptop (starting in 2008, the approved model is a Fujitsu tablet PC) and uses it throughout her school years both on campus and at home to enhance instruction. The school maintains the students' laptops and supplies them with needed applications.

And that's the challenge. On the first day of school, 830 students have laptops that need applications and e-books updated, along with possible maintenance. Learning can't get started until that's done.

Solving this challenge falls to Director of Technology Jason Hyams and his team of three IT technicians. They're assisted by a technology coordinator who also trains and teaches.

Three years ago, Hyams came to St. Agnes from the corporate IT world with a personal mission: Take a technology-aware school and make its infrastructure even more useful, increasing educational value.

He and his team have made progress: The wireless network used to support only 300 concurrent users; now it can support over 750 concurrent users. It once was a challenge to sign on to the network, and there was no easy way to share documents. The IT team got frequent calls for password reset help. Now there's a self-service portal accessible from any Web browser, it's easy to share and store documents centrally, and users perform self-service password resets. "It's really about simplification," Hyams says.

"Altiris SVS Pro saves us 1,600 technician hours a year, worth about \$80,000. Payback is in four months."

Jason Hyams

Director of Technology
St. Agnes Academy

ORGANIZATION PROFILE

In Houston, Texas, St. Agnes Academy (www.st-agnes.org) is a Catholic college preparatory school for young women. Owned and administered by the Dominican Sisters, it has 70 faculty and 30 staff, and provides 830 students in grades 9-12 with opportunities for education and personal growth within the context of the Catholic faith.

INDUSTRY

Education

SOLUTION

Client Management

Greater licensing control increases value from each licensing dollar.

A barrier to learning

But application and e-book distribution and license management remained to be simplified. Teachers were still carrying a box of books on CD into the classroom on the first day and handing them out. Students tried to install the CDs on their laptops—and challenges emerged.

“For the first week or two,” remembers Hyams, “our technicians would be running between classrooms to help students, putting their hands on well over half the notebooks on campus. When you have 830 student notebooks and just three to four technicians, that’s a big undertaking.”

Meanwhile, he points out, no technicians were in the student repair center to fix broken computers, and there were easily 120 to 150 systems at the beginning of the year that needed fixing.

Licensing out of control

It was also tough to track licenses. “I had no idea of how many electronic books we had out there, or how many were checked out,” Hyams says. “All I know is that when students needed a book after that first two week period, they would come to the repair center. We would have an extra copy, and we’d have to install it for them.”

Altiris SVS Pro simplifies

In Hyam’s first year, the team began using Altiris Software Virtualization Solution Professional (SVS Pro) from Symantec. (It was then called AppStream, a technology that has since been acquired by Symantec and integrated into Altiris SVS Pro.)

Altiris SVS Pro virtualizes applications and e-books and enables them to be streamed on demand transparently to users. When students sign on to their portals, they see icons representing applications and e-books for the courses for which they’ve registered. When they click on these icons, Altiris SVS Pro delivers code for each function the student requests, served in managed units called Virtual Software Packages which are streamed in the background. To

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SOLUTION AT A GLANCE

Key Challenges

- Increase educational value by enabling education on demand
- Streamline application and e-book provisioning with a self-service portal
- Reduce IT overhead
- Simplify and enhance software license management

Solution

Centralized application streaming and license management from Symantec

Symantec Products

Altiris™ Software Virtualization Solution Professional (SVS Pro)

Technology Environment

- Clients: Fujitsu 4220 tablet PC, Lenovo ThinkPad T41, T43, T60, X60, and X61
- Applications: Microsoft Office 2003 and 2007, Adobe Photoshop, Dreamweaver, InDesign
- Server platform: Microsoft Windows Server 2003

Business Results

- Increased learning—from any Web browser anytime
- 40% reduction in help desk tickets (5,000/yr. to 3,000/yr.)
- \$80,000 in tech time (1,600 hours) available for more valuable tasks
- 2 to 5 days reclaimed in instruction time within a 180-day year
- As much as two-fold to four-fold gain in users per application license dollar
- 100% payback in four months

the student, this is transparent. The application or e-book behaves as if it was installed locally. After a short time, it is cached locally in its entirety.

But because the application or e-book is contained in a “bubble” called a Virtual Software Package, it can use the correct file and registry settings without modifying the operating system and without interfering with other applications. And the team can manage its license centrally. The benefits are many.

More learning time: two to five days reclaimed

Students don't load CDs anymore. “On the first day the teacher can say ‘Click on your book and go to page five,’” Hyams says. “And in the background, Altiris SVS Pro caches down the books 100 percent, enabling students to work offline. Altiris SVS Pro enables teachers to reclaim two to five days of instruction at the beginning of what is about a 180 day school year.”

Work from anywhere

Also, a student can access all her applications and e-books from any Web browser—not just from her laptop. She can learn from any computer, including a loaner if her laptop needs maintenance. “And we're still able to manage the licenses,” Hyams says. “If a student pulls an application down on someone else's computer, it's going to be active for a period of time, then automatically remove itself when she's done. That's been powerful.”

Student productivity jumps

When students took classes involving applications such as Adobe Photoshop, Dreamweaver, or InDesign, they used to be restricted to using the applications only on desktops in the computer lab during their 45 minute class period. Now the applications can be pulled down at home or from any computer. “The students really learn the application,” Hyams notes, “and the projects have become bigger and better.”

Hyams has granular online control of individual licenses. “If at the end of the semester a student says ‘I'm working on a birthday project for my mother—may I have longer?’ I can go to the user site and give her 7 or 14 more days—whatever she needs.”

More users per licensing dollar

The school is actually spending slightly more money for licensing now, not less, Hyams says. But he doesn't mind because students and teachers receive far more educational value for each licensing dollar.

“More students and faculty members ask for applications such as Photoshop or InDesign because it's easier to get them,” Hyams observes. “I no longer have to buy 100 licenses for 100 users. If a faculty member has a short project for which they need Photoshop, Altiris SVS Pro lets me set a policy that on a certain date—or if the application is idle for a given period—the license is reclaimed. The result is that we have two- to four-fold more users per licensing dollar.”

And the school gains greater copyright protection, Hyams notes. “SVS Pro forms a bubble around our e-books,” he says. “It encapsulates a publisher's PDF files so it's more difficult for a student to be able to bring down a package and strip out the content. That helps protect publisher rights.”

100 percent payback in four months

Technicians no longer load applications or e-books. “When technicians re-imaged a laptop, they'd have to ask students to write down their classes, then pull the CDs and install them. Altiris SVS Pro saves us 1,600 technician hours a year, worth about \$80,000. Payback is in four months. And technicians can focus on faster repairs in the repair center, making students and faculty more productive.”

More learning and 40 percent less trouble

“My first year we had over 5,000 repair tickets,” Hyams says. “The second year, after putting in the portal and starting to use Altiris SVS Pro, we dropped that number to under 3,000 tickets.”

The impact is far beyond time saved, Hyams sums up. “Altiris SVS Pro gives us not just applications on demand, but education on demand,” he notes. “We can push content to students anywhere and anytime and deliver greater educational value. And license management is so much easier. At the end of the school year, we can set licenses to expire automatically on student laptops. To have license management on non-managed machines—that's huge.”

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