

CASE STUDY



A New Mac Management Solution for Luton Sixth Form College

Business Situation Summary

- All systems need to be on the same software level
- No automation in place
- No server-grade hardware available from Apple
- Native System Center features not stable enough

Solution Summary

- Implementation of Parallels® Mac Management
- Leverage existing Wintel server hardware
- Enroll Mac computers in existing System Center environment

Benefits Summary

- Easy rollout of software to all Mac computers
- Quick learning curve
- Long-term guaranteed hardware support
- Additional benefits of inventory and profile management

Parallels Products Used

- Parallels Mac Management for Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM)
- Parallels Desktop® for Mac Enterprise Edition

Business Challenge

7:30 AM – At Luton Sixth Form College, Ian North is opening up the doors to the college’s IT classrooms. The spacious facilities of the new campus building are equipped with the latest generation of PCs and Mac® computers. In only a few minutes, the first students will arrive for their IT lessons.

Founded in 1966, Luton Sixth Form College was the first sixth form college in Great Britain. Located in Bedfordshire, approximately 30 miles north of London, the college attracts students from around the world.

Students and their personal development are the focus of attention at the college—here, people from all continents meet in an open-minded, modern world of learning. Computers are, of course, no exception. The combination seems to be ideal: More than 1,000 students each year leave Luton Sixth Form College with qualifications for university-level studies, and around 100 of them follow the call of elite universities worldwide.

Luton Sixth Form College is equipped with more than 1,400 PCs and approximately 80 Mac machines, ranging from iMac® to MacBook Pro® to Mac mini, all running OS X® Mavericks (10.9). They are connected to the central network infrastructure, as are the college’s PCs, and are managed centrally. However, it has taken a long time to get here.

A few months ago, North—an IT systems engineer at the college—had to spend a lot of time sitting at each Mac to install the latest security updates and new software packages. With 2,594 students and an equal number of computer users, the college had many administrative tasks to perform. “Our systems need to be secure, and the applications installed on all the Macs need to be of the same version for the lessons,” said North. The result was a great deal of work dealing with Mac-induced headaches, as well as many hours of maintaining the systems.

“We lost so much time updating application software manually or reinstalling it,” said North. They tried to manage their Mac computers with a combination of Apple Remote Desktop™ (ARD) and Mac OS X Server’s in-product tools. “The problem with ARD was that it isn’t an automated solution, and that too many operations had to be performed by the system administrator,” North said. “We found that the built-in tools in OS X were inadequate for the task.”

“The rollout of the Parallels solution was no problem.”

—Ian North, IT Systems Engineer

Landscape

- Luton Sixth Form College
IT classrooms
- 1,400 PCs running Windows 7
- 80 Mac computers running
OS X Mavericks (10.9)

PC Management Platform-

- Microsoft Windows Server 2012
- System Center Configuration
Manager 2012 R2

Need

- Consolidated management
system to oversee both
PCs and Mac computers
- Eliminate need to manually
update Mac computers

Solutions Considered

- ARD and OS X Server tools
- Parallels Mac Management
plug-in for Microsoft SCCM

By that time, the Xserve® deployed by the college had reached the end of its life. Apple® had discontinued the line and was not producing any suitable hardware to replace it—so the college decided to look for a new solution. As they already used Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) 2012 R2 for managing their PCs, they wanted to find a product that could be integrated into it. For their Mac computers, they wanted to get away from the approach of using complete system images for each machine. In addition, the hard disk content on their mobile MacBook workstations had to be encrypted.

The college tested Microsoft’s native solution but felt it was not stable enough; its functionality was limited, and adding applications and settings was overcomplicated. The installation of Microsoft® Agent caused problems: Each application had to be converted into a format readable for SCCM. To establish settings, they needed to locate numerous preference files (PLISTS) and find the appropriate values inside them. This meant an additional training burden, especially for Ian North’s less technically experienced team members. The intermediary tool between these two worlds is the Parallels Management proxy. Acting as a small bridge element at the lowest level of

“A seamless management solution for Mac and Windows was very important to us,” said North, referring to familiarity and reduced training efforts. In the end, the college decided to deploy the Parallels Mac Management plug-in for Microsoft SCCM. This solution integrated seamlessly into their existing SCCM system and policies. “The rollout of the Parallels solution was no problem,” North said.

an operating system, the proxy forwards the information collected by the Parallels Agent to the SCCM. End users do not see any of this, and that is where the solution shines: The end user wants a workstation that’s ready to use, while the administrator must keep an eye on compliance, security updates, and the user’s software needs—and both of them want to do their job within regular working hours.

The core of the college’s management solution runs on a Dell PowerEdge 2950 server with Microsoft Windows Server 2012 and System Center Configuration Manager 2012 R2. Using SCCM’s default management console, North and his colleagues can comfortably access all the computers on their network, which has the Parallels Mac Management plug-in fully integrated. As a result, Mac computers are full members of the college’s IT network today. They are supported just like Windows computers, are always up-to-date, and can be adapted to spontaneous individual requirements at any time using Parallels Mac Management for SCCM.

Now, when Ian North locks the IT rooms at Luton Sixth Form College in the evenings, the school’s students are one step closer to graduating fully qualified—and North goes home feeling good in the knowledge that with his computers, he is contributing to their success.

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