

Hampshire Libraries



Background

In 2002 the government launched a project named the People's Network to provide Internet access for the public in all UK libraries, funded initially through the National Lottery. The Hampshire project was managed by Hampshire Library and Information Service, part of Hampshire County Council, who decided to provide 2mbps connectivity to each of the 54 libraries in the county.

The numbers of PCs varied from a single PC in the smallest libraries, with up to 20 or more in the largest libraries, all running Windows XP software connected to two central servers. The total installed base of PCs distributed over the entire county has now risen to 300 and this number is likely to increase in future. The service is available free of charge to any member of the public, as part of the central and local government vision to prevent anyone being excluded from the benefits of information technology.

The People's Network has been an unprecedented success according to Kirsty Robinson, People's Network Development Manager for Hampshire Library and Information Service. "The computers are in use 26,000 hours per month for an average of 44,000 sessions. The library caters to a broad mix of individuals, ranging from computer literate users, to people that need a great deal of help. We have a lot of job hunters, students, OAPs, schoolchildren who use them to do their homework when they don't have a PC at home and foreign workers who use the library PCs to stay in touch with their family and friends via e-mail".

The Challenge

Prior to introducing high speed connectivity to the library computers, individual PCs used dial-up modem connections, with various methods employed to prevent user access to certain parts of the computer. According to Matthew Waite, IT consultant at the local authority, "The need to provide a more comprehensive security solution quickly became apparent. The existing solution was constantly being compromised and users were finding all sorts of ways to bypass the desktop security. Users were constantly changing the PC settings and downloading their own software to the PC. We had several occasions when the language settings had been changed, which completely baffled the next user. All of this resulted in extra work for the help desk in Winchester and many onsite visits to rebuild PCs."

The installation of the People's Network provided a perfect reason to re-evaluate the desktop security and find a more secure alternative. Systems integrator, Unisys, was asked to recommend a solution as part of their overall development of the system for Hampshire County Council.

The Solution

Unisys recommended SecureWave's Sanctuary end-point software, which is designed to protect the desktop from running any undesirable software, whether this be viruses, trojans, spyware or other malware, or simply unauthorised software. The technology is based on a white list approach to security. This identifies all the software executables that have been explicitly authorised and only permits those to run on the PCs. By

default, everything else is denied.

According to Matthew Waite, "Sanctuary enables us to create an image of the software we want to run, which includes Internet Explorer and the various Microsoft Office applications. Everything else is barred, to prevent users downloading software that could damage the system. For the users, what is important is reliability and consistency. They need to come into the Library and be able to use the PCs in the same way each time."

He continues, "Now, when we add new software or update existing software we make the changes on a single machine, then scan the image and do a comparison to the previous scan. Then we look at the differences and enable access to those applications or executables that we want to run."

The Benefits

The installation of the SecureWave Sanctuary software has had a dramatic effect on support resources says Matthew Waite. "We only have ten people in our team and we support not only the libraries but also other Hampshire County Council services such as the Treasurers and the Social Services network. We used to have a regular influx of calls from the library every week, which placed a heavy workload on our team. Since we've installed Sanctuary we've never had a call out to a PC due to the settings being changed or software downloaded to a machine. The People's Network has been problematic to run from many perspectives but SecureWave's solution has never let us down. It's the best software we have on the People's Network."

Kirsty Robinson adds “Installing the additional security measures has made life much easier for the staff. It’s very important for inexperienced PC users to see a familiar desktop environment. The public know that when they come in to use our computers they will look the same as last time”.

Another benefit is the increased availability of the service. “With the previous system, PCs were frequently out of use, awaiting repair by a member of the support staff. Now we have completely removed one of the major causes of downtime on the PCs.” She continues, “Most people

understand that because this is a public service they cannot customise the PCs in the way they could at home. However, we still have the occasional individual that tries to do something to the PCs. With SecureWave Sanctuary, they simply find that it’s not possible.”

Future Developments

Looking to the future, the council is planning on upgrading some libraries to Discovery Centres, which will combine the traditional library services with museum, heritage and other recreational facilities. These could have up to twice as many public

computers as existing libraries, so reliability will be an even greater issue. A small Discovery Centre has already opened at Odiham library and work is under way at Gosport and Winchester, with further projects likely. Says Kirsty “We consider the SecureWave software a vital piece of our IT armoury to help ensure that the PCs will be available to the public at all times”.



SecureWave
Safeguarding Tomorrow

www.securewave.com
info@securewave.com

North America

13755 Sunrise Valley Drive
Suite 203
Herndon, VA 20171
United States of America
+1 (703) 713 - 3960 Phone
+1 (703) 793 - 7007 Fax

United Kingdom

Midsummer Court
314 Midsummer Boulevard
Milton Keynes MK9 2UB
United Kingdom
+44 (0) 1908 357 897 Phone
+44 (0) 1908 357 600 Fax

Continental Europe and Rest of World

Atrium Business Park
23, rue du Puits Romain
L-8070 Bertrange
Luxembourg
+352 265 364-11 Phone
+352 265 364-12 Fax

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