"I can never skip out."

"Absolute Manage has everything we were looking for and a few things we didn't really expect to get out of a single system. We got full-featured asset management, a lightning fast rollout and the real bonus is that we can extend the same management to our PC population at any time. Most systems do one or the other, not both platforms."

Talha Basit
Client Software and Systems Manager
Chicago Public Schools

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS | CPS

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Taming the wild west: How America's third largest school district manages Apple Devices

Summary

Located in metro Chicago, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the education institution for more than 400,000 K-12 students in the region. CPS pursues a leading approach to integrating technology into the learning experience and provides students with access to computers throughout their education. For the district's IT administration team, managing more than 10,000 Apple® computers presents a major challenge shared with many other large organizations. After a review of available solutions, the Client Software and Systems group at CPS selected Absolute® Manage by Absolute Software to automate the management of its Mac computer population. Today, the IT administration team is able to deliver a fast, cost-effective and secure computing experience for Mac users – freeing administrators, teaching staff and students to focus on learning outcomes.

Managing Macs in a Windows Environment

The IT administration challenge at America's third largest school district is daunting. In total, the district is made up of 675 elementary schools, high schools and charter schools. Distributed across this network of local facilities are approximately 10,000 Mac computers. To further complicate matters, these computers are used by a wide variety of end users ranging from tech – savvy computer science instructors to brand new computer users in the elementary grades. According to Talha Basit, Client Software and Systems Manager at Chicago Public Schools, "It's pretty safe to say that our Mac computer population represents a unique and difficult responsibility for our team. They're seldom here at our office and the expectation from our administration and faculty is that they will be patched, secure and fully functional – just like the rest of our computer population. Our job is to make sure that the group using these computers never has to give any thought to the ongoing maintenance of their computer. And, we must be accountable for the total cost of ownership on those machines. Before we put a lifecycle management solution in place, we just couldn't deliver, it was the wild west when it came to Macs."

In Search of a Solution

Like many large organizations attempting to administer Apple products in an enterprise-caliber environment, Chicago Public Schools found that the selection of lifecycle management solutions capable of truly managing Macs was limited. "Administering thousands of Macs is our everyday reality so we weren't willing to give up anything when it came to choosing a system. We wanted full asset management, software deployment, the ability to run scripts – everything we're used to managing PCs," says Basit. After a review of available systems including LANDesk, the Casper suite, BigFix and a number of SCCM add ons, Chicago Public Schools elected to deploy Absolute Manage.

"Before Absolute Manage, this was painful. Our Help Desk would get a large volume of calls for Mac support. This all changed when we went to touchless service with Absolute Manage to manage all of our Apple products including the Mac servers. Because we can now remotely image, patch and totally remediate a system sitting right there in a classroom at say, Carson Elementary, support calls for Macs have been reduced by at least 70%."

Talha Basit
Client Software and Systems Manager
Chicago Public Schools

About Absolute Manage

Absolute Manage is the flagship computer configuration lifecycle management solution from Absolute Software. It is unique in that it offers true cross-platform functionality allowing IT administrators to manage their entire Apple and PC computer population from within the same system. Features include:

| Application & License Management | Security, Change & Configuration Management | Patch Management | Computer Imaging | Asset Inventory | Power Management |

Absolute Manage is the world's only persistent computer lifecycle management solution. Using patented Computrace® persistence technology, Absolute Manage is able to self-heal if the application agent is removed from a computer, providing a constant connection to each managed device regardless of employee or criminal attempts at tampering.

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Changing everyday reality

A great illustration of the struggle to manage Mac computers in a large organization is the back-to-school process. In the space of a week, thousands of computers are reactivated, reassigned and put back in service for the school year. "Before Absolute Manage, this was painful," says Basit. "Our Help Desk would get a large volume of calls for Mac support." Typically, this would mean that a field service technician would have to burn a disk with the required OS or software, drive to the school and physically install it on each individual client computer. Even if the district IT administration team was content to handle a high volume of cases in this manual fashion, the fact that field service calls are outsourced made it cost-prohibitive.

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Green Initiative: Implementing a Power Management Policy

One of the most obvious rationales for implementing an enterprise IT asset management program is to take advantage of the cost savings and environmental benefits that can be obtained simply by turning computers off when they're not in use. Chicago Public Schools realized this early as part of the district's eGreen program. "Before Absolute Manage, we really had no means of implementing a power management policy for our Macs," says Basit. "Now it's great – we can set a custom power management schedule for Macs depending on which school they're in and how they're being used. Students and teachers hardly notice, but we sure do. The energy savings are remarkable for such a simple change."

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Talha Basit
Client Software and Systems Manager
Chicago Public Schools

Complemented by Computrace

Chicago Public Schools was no stranger to Absolute Software and its solutions before deploying Absolute Manage. The Client Software and Systems team uses the Computrace laptop tracking and theft recovery solution to keep tabs on nearly 40,000 highly mobile laptop computers. The system allows Basit and his team to track computers over the internet, detect tampering and, in the event of theft, the Absolute Theft Recovery Team tracks them down so that they can be recovered by local law enforcement. "Computrace really gives us the ability to proactively manage laptop computers and has had a fantastic theft deterrent effect. We widely promote the fact that our mobile computers have Computrace on them and that has worked out well for us."

Looking to the Future

Chicago Public Schools' use of Apple products continues to increase. In addition to the increased use of Mac computers, the district is rapidly adopting Apple iPad devices in both the classroom and in administration. Like Mac computers before them, they represent a great new learning tool that must also be managed by district IT administration. According to Basit, "The iPad is still a relatively new product and we already have over 1,000 throughout the district. The fact that we will be able to manage these devices using the system we are already familiar with is really an unexpected and most welcome surprise."

About Absolute Software

Absolute Software Corporation is the leader in tracking, managing and protecting computers and mobile devices. The Company's Computrace, Absolute Manage and LoJack® for Laptops solutions provide theft recovery, data protection and computer lifecycle management capabilities to organizations and consumers. The Company's software agent is embedded in the firmware of computers by global leaders. For more information about Absolute Software, visit www.absolute.com and http://blog.absolute.com

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