



New Tool Helps Kent School District Manage Notebooks for the Classroom

Washington school district uses Computrace to inventory computers and crack down on notebook thieves

Summary

Located in Kent, Washington, Kent School District (Kent SD) fulfills the K-12 education requirements of more than 27,000 students in the communities of Kent, Covington, and Fairwood. Known for its leading approach to information technology in the classroom, the district began introducing notebook computers into its programs as early as 1998. With the growth of its student body and notebook population, the district's IT team was challenged to prevent theft, accurately inventory computers and equitably distribute mobile computers across the district's 40 buildings. Having toured a number of other school districts in search of best practices, the district conducted a pilot program to test Computrace from Absolute Software on 90 tablet PCs. Initially, Kent SD selected the system for its theft recovery capabilities but has now implemented Computrace across its entire 12,000+ notebook and desktop population. With Computrace for notebook management, the district has significantly reduced its annual inventory project to running a 5-minute report.

Leveling the Playing Field With Technology

Kent School District has long understood the learning benefits that mobile computer labs can deliver. Currently, the district operates on a 4:1 student to computer ratio, and under its One-to-One program, plans to change the learning process by providing every student with a computer. To keep its computer population current, the district works with its computer manufacturer to refresh its notebooks every four years and desktops every five years.

According to the district's Executive Director of Information Technology Thuan Nguyen, "We have first-hand experience with the impact notebook computers can have in the classroom. We selected 180 students from a disadvantaged school that had consistently ranked low in academic performance – a school next door to a local penitentiary – and established the Kent Technology Academy. We changed their learning experience and provided staff and students with personal tablet PCs. After two years, this school is performing at the same level as the schools in our most affluent neighborhoods. Mobile computers and new instructional strategies are the primary reasons for this amazing improvement."

Managing Notebooks for the Classroom: A Challenge for IT

So, Kent School District had demonstrated that notebook computers could help deliver a better education for district students. Next, Kent SD's Information Technology team had to tackle the challenging logistics of managing more than 12,000 computers in the hands of students spread out across 40 district facilities. Trying not to reinvent the wheel, Nguyen and his team toured a number of other large school districts to get an understanding of how they managed their notebook computers. According to Nguyen, "As educators, we don't have to worry about competing with each other. As we toured other districts, we quickly learned that notebook computers posed two huge challenges: theft deterrence and IT asset management. Essentially, they told us, you need to know where they are and stop tampering and theft. Then, our computer manufacturer recommended that we look at Computrace to help with this."



“While we have come to rely on Computrace for its off-the-network IT asset management capabilities, the fact that we have the ability to deter theft and recover stolen computers is very reassuring. When we buy a new computer, we now know that we can count on getting the full value of it over four or five years – the Service Guarantee is like insurance for us.”

Thuan Nguyen
Kent School District
Executive Director of Information Technology

How IT Asset Management Affects Public Funding

Typical of many larger districts, Kent SD’s funding is achieved through a very public process. Every four years, the district puts forward a detailed plan outlining planned technology expenditure. The plan is then reviewed, voted on at the community level and district residents are responsible for funding as a portion of their annual property taxes.

“As a publicly-funded district, we are required to physically touch each computer once annually as part of state regulatory compliance procedure,” says Nguyen. “It is so important that we can demonstrate accountability for the funds we receive from the community. We also need to plan for and refresh 2,500 – 3,000 computers each summer. This process was incredibly tedious. Before Computrace, we would assign 10 people to sleuth out the location of all of our computers over a three month period.”

Over the course of its annual notebook computer audit, Kent SD’s IT staff struggled to locate computers locked in filing cabinets, taken home by students and a host of other backwaters mobile computers can fall into. “We literally had 10 people with barcode scanners attempting to find 12, 000 computers. It was a great effort. With Computrace, we always know where our computers are. What was once a three-month process is now as simple as running a five-minute report that is more than 99% accurate. That, is accountability.”

Computrace Makes Large-Scale Computer Management Achievable

Having worked with its computer manufacturer to purchase computers with Computrace built in at the factory, Kent SD now manages its entire computer population made up of both desktop and notebook computers using the system. By logging in to the Absolute Customer Center, Nguyen and his team have access to at-a-glance information on every computer they are responsible for including: its location and user, hardware and software installed, current virus protection status – even whether students have installed prohibited software or tampered with hardware. And, if a computer is stolen, the Absolute Theft Recovery Team will use Computrace to locate the computer, work with local police to recover it and assist in the prosecution of thieves – backed by a \$1,000 Service Guarantee.¹ Computrace can even be used to remotely delete sensitive records from computers in the event of a theft.

How It Works

The software agent that powers Computrace is built into the firmware of each computer during the manufacturing process.² This Agent silently calls into the Absolute Monitoring Center daily to report the computer’s information. Kent SD’s IT team can then access this information through the Absolute Customer Center – an online portal that summarizes information about the district’s computer population. When a computer equipped with Computrace is reported stolen, the Computrace agent sends a silent signal over the Internet to the Absolute Monitoring Center, providing critical location information. With firmware support, the Computrace Agent is capable of surviving operating system re-installations, as well as hard-drive reformat, replacements and re-imaging.

Theft Deterrence

Originally, it was Computrace’s reputation as a theft deterrence and recovery system that caused Nguyen to further research the system. “The districts we visited told us that notebook theft would be an obstacle in a district as large as ours, so we initially looked at Computrace to help us recover computers after they were stolen or tampered with. We quickly found that it

¹ Certain conditions apply. For full details visit: www.absolute.com/Service_Agreement.pdf

² For a complete list of firmware-supported computers visit: www.absolute.com/firmware.

could do much more, but in a district our size, it was only a matter of time until we got to test Computrace in a theft situation.”

One Friday night, thieves broke into a school facility and made off with a complete notebook cart containing 30 notebooks along with their power cables and other items. Having notified local police, Nguyen’s team immediately reported the theft to the Absolute Theft Recovery Team. Saturday morning, one of the stolen computers called home to report its location. The team of former law enforcement officers from Absolute Software tracked the computer to an individual who claimed they had purchased the computer from someone at a local shopping mall. Fortunately, the next two computers recovered by the joint police/Absolute Theft Recovery Officer investigation were in the hands of the original thieves. Two alleged thieves are now in police custody and facing charges.

On another occasion, a director’s car was burglarized and a notebook containing planning information was stolen. Concerned over the possibility that the information could be used by thieves, Kent SD opted to issue a remote data delete command to the computer to delete the sensitive information and rendered the computer useless to thieves. According to Nguyen, “While we have come to rely on Computrace for its off-the-network IT asset management capabilities, the fact that we have the ability to deter theft and recover stolen computers is very reassuring. When we buy a new computer, we now know that we can count on getting the full value of it over four or five years – the Service Guarantee is like insurance for us.”

Plans for the Future

As part of its One-to-One notebook computer program, Kent School District plans to target a student to computer ratio of 1:1 for computer-aged students while increasing its overall computer population to more than 17,000 computers, each equipped with Computrace. “With the confidence we now have, we can deliver on the obligation to protect our community’s expanded investment in mobile computer labs. This year’s seventh grade students will now have a notebook of their own until they graduate from our district and move on to post-secondary education. We’ve done things the right way, and I think we’re well prepared for future expansion of the program.”

About Absolute Software

Absolute® Software is the leader in computer theft recovery, data protection and secure IT asset management. Absolute provides organizations the ability to accurately and securely track their computing assets, manage leased computers, ensure software license compliance, deter computer loss, protect data and recover stolen computers. The company has key partnerships with global leaders, including Dell, Lenovo, MPC, HP, Fujitsu, and the Company has reselling partnerships with these OEMs and others, including Apple. For more information about Absolute Software and its Computrace suite, visit: www.absolute.com