



Client Management

EFFECTIVE IT OUTSOURCING FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR, a service provider for local authorities based in East Westphalia, Germany, run some 1,200 client systems for eleven local authorities in the region. Since mid-2009 INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR has been administrating the PC landscape of its customers with DX-Union by MATERNA. In particular the software management of their heterogeneous client systems has become simpler and more efficient as a result.

INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR provides a range of services related to IT outsourcing for local authorities in the East Westphalia region, allowing the local authorities to concentrate on their core functions. Among other things, INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR provisions PC workplaces, equips them with software and then administrates them. To tackle the diversity of tasks involved in software management the service provider relies on a client management solution.

"After the customer support for our previous client management solution was discontinued, we had to act quickly. We looked at a number of products, and two were shortlisted. In the end, DX-Union was chosen. Above all, it was the price and the technical functions which won us over," reports Wolfgang Escher, head of the Competence Center for Technical Systems at INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR. These include, for example, package options, the driver wizard and the

linking with other systems of data inventoried by DX-Union. Their sales partner was Membrain.

INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR looks after eleven local authorities with around 1,200 PC workplaces. Every local authority has different requirements of the software it uses. Around 110 software packages have to be kept ready and distributed. These largely comprise, in addition to the operating systems and the Office suite, a variety of specialist applications, including: Infoma for financial accounting, Meso for the registration office, and its own product "Votemanager" as an all-round solution for the electoral office. The hardware environment is highly heterogeneous, although most sites employ Intel PCs with Windows XP. Furthermore, around 20 per cent of the workplaces are notebooks. DX-Union's administrative functions cover the main service office, eleven branches and an autonomous training section.

Software packages in a heterogeneous landscape

The migration of the software packages from the legacy system has meanwhile been completed successfully. "Thanks to SLD2DXU the migration was uncomplicated and went well," Manuela Hollecker, System Administrator at INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR, tells us with a smile. SLD2DXU is a graphic migration tool. It extracts PC accounts, corresponding software packages and necessary data from the data management and automatically transfers them from Symantec LiveState Delivery to DX-Union in next to no time.

"In our heterogeneous hardware landscape the testing of the software package is particularly important. We often used to have problems with it – for example when drivers didn't work and we had to carry out repeated tests. The DX-Union driver wizard now saves us a great deal of work because we no longer have to enter anything manually in the script, since the wizard automates these processes," Manuela Hollecker explains the demands on the new software: heterogeneous hardware landscapes, in particular, place a considerable load on the drivers. Because in extreme cases each PC needs different drivers for the network, graphic and sound cards. The driver wizard reduces this complexity. Upon installation the operating system itself automatically selects the right driver – together with DX-Union. The drivers simply have to be added to the depot beforehand via the graphic interface of the DX-Union driver wizard.

In addition, INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR uses the package wizard and DX-Union Robot for scripting and the packaging of components. "To further simplify the tests with new software packages and to speed up the provisioning of test PCs, we are in the process of setting up a test environment with virtual machines. So, before the packages to be tested are installed, a snapshot of the virtual machine is produced. Once the package has been successfully installed, we restore the status of the virtual machine at the time of the snapshot and the test continues," adds Manuela Hollecker.

Installation parameters provide for flexibility and individuality

Because the IT environments of the local authorities vary very widely, installation parameters play a major role in the process of software packaging. For

example, the Windows XP package contains around 20 different installation parameters. With the parameters, a variety of target systems can be equipped uniformly with the necessary software.

"It would be great if we could set installation parameters for software groups in future. Then it would be even easier to allocate software to PCs," wishes Manuela Hollecker. Although a combination of software packages can be put together for a certain workstation type, the precise specification of these packages, as required for this group, is not given until the actual allocation takes place. "It would also be useful if individual software packages from a software group could be deinstalled separately," according to the system administrator. At present it is only possible to delete the software group as a whole. MATERNA regularly takes on board such suggestions from customers in its development of DX-Union.

Multitenant system supports individuality

INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR distributes the tested software packages from the depot of the master server to its branches in a remote session. This takes place by means of hierarchical software distribution. In every local authority there is a separate domain controller which centrally authenticates and authorizes the PCs and users. The user and access administration in DX-Union has a special role here, since some of the larger towns among INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR's customers employ their own system administrators. They have administrator rights for the PCs at their branches, which means that appropriate organisational structures have to be set up for every customer on the master server. The administrators can, for example, autonomously distribute software packages to the PCs allocated to them, view the corresponding inventory data and carry out other administration tasks. This multitenant capability was another factor contributing to the selection of DX-Union.

A further advantage of DX-Union is that installation dependencies can be defined. Since Version 6.3, it has been possible for the system administrator to define exemptions for installation dependencies. This allows the prevention of a simultaneous allocation of two software packages to a single PC in cases where it would lead to problems or where it would be technically impossible anyway. The system administrator can also define preferred installation sequences.

Integration of inventory data in third-party systems

For the asset tracking of hardware and software data INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR uses the Asset Assistant by DX-Union. The Asset Assistant affords the administrator an insight into how PCs are equipped at different sites at the click of a button. Among the assets evaluated are licences, primary storage and hard disk space. The asset tracking also supplies a practical overview of the lifecycle of the end devices.

“Our customers would like a good overview of their data so that they can integrate them easily into other formats. Some of the larger towns, for example, use databases for their licence management. This data can be conveniently transferred from DX-Union,” explains head of the Competence Center Wolfgang Escher. In future INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR plans to link DX-Union with the User Helpdesk (UHD) so that inventory data from DX-Union is available in the UHD. ■

ADVANTAGES

- Fast and simple setting up of new PCs
- Fast update of PCs (renewal of the operating system partition only, data remains on the PC)
- Fast and simple allocation of software packages to branches without need for site visits
- Simple installation of drivers using driver wizard
- Clearly laid out information about inventoried hardware and software
- Easy transfer of data from the DX-Union data management to other systems
- A number of convenient options for creating software packages

The company

INFOKOM Gütersloh AöR is an IT service provider for local authorities and offers a tailored IT outsourcing model for local authority administrations and related institutions. Its customers include district councils, town councils and parishes, as well as other local authority institutions. The products offered cover the whole bandwidth of the IT operations of local authorities. These may be specialist applications from commercial, technical or administrative fields. Further products in use include those which provide secondary support to the administrative operations, such as Internet, Office applications and network management