Richardson International and Its Use of Novell ZENworks Configuration Management

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Sponsored by Novell

Project Overview

Winnipeg, Manitoba-based Richardson International's MIS department started using Novell ZENworks 10 Configuration Management in June 2009 and reduced travel costs, increased client availability, and created an easier IT environment to configure, maintain, and update. The company anticipates saving $30,835 over the next year, and, in addition, the company is enjoying benefits such as an easier backup solution and a more flexible, secure IT environment. Additional project details include the following:

- Richardson faced the challenges of managing over 1,200 desktops spread over 100 separate locations across Western Canada. Updating the machines meant physically visiting them because Richardson did not have an automated way to update the machines from headquarters through the network.

- Richardson's solution was to install Novell ZENworks 10 Configuration Management into its environment. The company was able to move from a manually-intensive process of updating individual PCs at 100 operating locations, to a process where PCs could be automatically updated remotely.

- Benefits came from no longer having to physically visit machines, and instead using a centralized, automated system to update the machines over the corporate network. Richardson was able to save wear and tear, downtime, and travel costs from visiting remote office locations.

Solution Snapshot

Organization: Richardson International

Operational Challenge: Managing more than 1,200 desktop PCs spread over 100 separate locations across Western Canada

Solution: Implement Novell ZENworks 10 Configuration Management

Implementation Date: June 2009

Benefits: Centralized, automated system of updating remote PCs is projected to save Richardson more than $30,000 in travel costs for 2010. Additional benefits include improved backup capability, better manageability and security, and higher availability.

Canadian Agribusiness Grows IT Asset Management Capabilities

Employing over 1,600 people across Canada, Richardson is a worldwide handler and merchandiser of all major Canadian-grown grains and oilseeds. Through its Ag Business Centres, the Company sells crop inputs and related services to producers throughout Western Canada. With a canola processing plant in Lethbridge, Alberta, and a second plant soon to be opened in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Richardson is one of North America's largest suppliers of canola oil and meal. In all
areas of its business, Richardson continues to provide high quality products and superior service to its customers.

**Infrastructure**

Paul Beaudry, assistant vice president for Technical Services at Richardson, has a nine-person team to manage 1,200 PCs across 100 locations. The Winnipeg headquarters has 350 PCs, with the remaining PCs scattered around 6 Western Canadian provinces, in 100 separate offices and facilities. Each facility might have as few as 2 – 3 people or as many as 100, each supported by a PC that doubled as the IT shop’s storage point for that location, as well as a PC for one of the administrative assistants. That local storage point would, in turn, be backed up to the main server at Richardson’s headquarters through a DSL connection nightly.

**Challenges**

Beaudry says that his desktop support team answers phones for the service desk, as well as fixes the machines. In the rollout phase for an update to PCs in the field, Beaudry describes the following scenario: “I’m burning 90 CDs to get the stuff out and coordinating with the guys about which sites to visit and when. About half of the staff is in the field. Flights are scheduled and booked, and then we’re rolling out across Canada,” where distances between some of the sites can be more than a two-hour drive.

The biggest problem Beaudry had was spending too much time — typically 2 – 3 months out of a year — “keeping the lights on” when it came to technology updates, specifically around updating Richardson’s network of 1,200 Windows-based PCs. Updating the machines required physically visiting them, because Richardson didn’t have an automated way to update the machines outside the headquarters. “There was no time to do new stuff,” he adds.

Beaudry describes his IT configuration management tasks prior to implementing Novell ZENworks: “We had a yearly pilgrimage to visit a location. We’d touch the boxes and get them patched since we didn’t have a way to remotely patch them.” The team would do this in the winter, which is the company’s off-season.

**The Novell ZENworks Solution**

The IT group implemented Novell ZENworks Configuration Management in June 2009 and immediately saw benefits in moving from a manual approach of physically visiting machines to a centralized, automated system that updates machines over the corporate network. In addition, Richardson is able to save wear and tear on company vehicles, downtime, and travel costs from visiting remote office locations. Finally, by running ZENworks Configuration Management on SUSE Linux Enterprise Server, Richardson was able to save even more on infrastructure costs.

Beaudry says certain key features in ZENworks 10 Configuration Management were critical to success. “With the release of ZENworks Configuration Management, the satellite server we needed would now work on Linux,” he reports. “We’re really pleased with it. We deployed in June 2009, which for us was rare because we normally don’t want to hit users during the growing season, but it wasn’t disruptive. At the end of the day, ZENworks Configuration Management was a critical part of our IT infrastructure and helped us cut the cost and complexity of desktop management, so we can remain competitive.”

Beaudry and his team saved money in the first year implementing ZENworks Configuration Management by cutting travel to manually update PCs. And with its one-year license bundled in, Richardson is projected to save $30,835 in 2010, again from no longer having to travel to update PCs. But Richardson is gaining additional benefits as well, detailed in the following points:
Operating Environment Flexibility. Beaudry notes that this ability to manage remote PCs by running ZENworks Configuration Management on SUSE Linux Enterprise Server allows him to dramatically lower costs and have more flexibility in choosing the server platform on which to run this mission-critical application.

Better Backup Capability. Richardson was also able to gain better backup control and management of corporate data. Because the ZENworks Configuration Management satellite server runs on SUSE Linux Enterprise Server, Richardson no longer has to use disk drive space on a user's system to host a shared drive and now has a dedicated shared volume hosted on the satellite server available for users to store their files.

Improved Manageability and Security. Beaudry notes that, "Now my team doesn't have to travel to the machines to manage and update them. We can image onsite using the satellite serve if a DLL gets corrupted or goes missing." Beaudry added, "We have improved our security in that we are able to patch machines the day we get the patch, instead of waiting for the end of the harvest to do it."

Higher Availability. Richardson now experiences higher availability thanks to an automated capability to reimage PCs remotely, instead of replacing them with a PC shipped from the head office. This meant that IT people would have to visit a site, in some cases a couple of times a week, to repair PCs. "Before, we had remote control tools trying to fix the PC and would take time to troubleshoot. Now, we can just reimage the PC again using ZENworks Configuration Management. That saves a lot of time," says Beaudry.

Windows 7 Support. Although still in the testing phase, Beaudry says that Richardson intends to move toward Windows 7 on all its PCs. Richardson will use ZENworks Configuration Management to migrate existing applications to the new operating environment once new images have been created and checked out. Beaudry anticipates this happening in the next 24 months.

Conclusion

IDC expects that IT departments in need of asset management capabilities will want such capabilities integrated across multiple sites. Although in Richardson's case, the functions required were to enhance PC management, IDC also expects that larger organizations are going to want to incorporate functions for automating service-desk capabilities across the rest of the IT environment. This means that workflow and runbook automations solutions are, and will continue to be, adopted to address IT service management capabilities. Creations of IT services on behalf of business units require the IT department to manage across operations and infrastructure to provision new PCs or re-provision existing PCs to support employee moves within the company.

IT executives will continue to benefit from solutions that combine imaging and software distribution capabilities with IT asset discovery and inventory capabilities. This is especially important as IT managers need to assess costs for implementing changes to PCs and servers on the corporate network. These assessments must also focus on incorporating new services such as provisioning new PCs. As a starting point, IT managers should assess their organization's ability to incorporate IT services consistent with Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) best practices, along with length of experience with IT service management.

Methodology

Reference customer Richardson International was provided by Novell, and interviewed for its challenges associated with a number of manual desktop management processes. Calculations for time savings were based on assumptions and estimates for Richardson IT personnel's training and travel expenses, as well as hourly savings associated with time used in these activities.
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