

CASE STUDY

Wright State University Raising the banner of academic document management

A premier state university sought a reliable way to manage documents generated by their new UNIX-based administrative system. After carefully considering several vendor offerings, university IT staff selected the VPSX® solution to provide assured, encrypted delivery of academic and administrative information.

ORGANIZATION

Named after the world-famous Wright brothers, Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, continues their spirit of innovation. The university serves nearly 17,000 students, offering more than 100 undergraduate and 50 Ph.D., graduate, and professional degrees.

Like all academic institutions, Wright State University (WSU) faces a variety of critical challenges. In addition to being a place of learning, every university is a business - with suppliers, employees, customers, and other stakeholders whose needs must be met. While competitive and budgetary pressures affect all businesses, they are of paramount importance in the educational sector.

WSU'S CHANGING IT ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to addressing the computing needs of the staff and student populations, WSU relies on its CaTS team - short for Computing and

Telecomm Services. With operations spanning help desk services, application development, network, desktop, and telecomm support, the CaTS team plays an important role in nearly all university functions.

Until recently, most of WSU's primary applications ran in the university's IBM mainframe environment, and were updated in the 1990s using web front-end interfaces. For budgetary reasons, however, the university decided to replace the custom-developed mainframe applications with a popular UNIX-based academic software suite called Banner.

FINDING A UNIX OUTPUT MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

WSU's Banner implementation includes modules for financial aid, payroll, and student registration as well as Bursar's office and HR functions. While these applications could functionally replace many of the existing mainframe systems, the CaTS team knew that they would need a new way to manage documents generated by this UNIX-based application suite.

The decision was made to purchase a vendor-supported solution instead of developing the software internally. "Our team drew up a list of requirements and prepared to issue an RFP," explained Phil Neff, Associate Director of Systems Services at CaTS. "Looking at the solutions in the marketplace, there is almost no end to the types of features available. The challenge was in determining which functions were immediate necessities and which would

extend the system's usefulness into the future - all while keeping costs at a reasonable level today."

A key member of the team was system administrator Steve Wynne. "For me, the support and reliability of the vendor are just as important as the features of their software," says Wynne. "Banner documents are becoming a crucial part of university operations, so our output management system needs to deliver flexibility, responsiveness, and high availability."

VPSX SOLUTION SETS THE CURVE

Several vendors responded to Wright State's output management RFP. The team immediately began evaluating various solutions against a defined list of criteria. (See sidebar: "Wright State Wish List").

"One of the most important factors was the level of vendor support," says Wynne. "The VPSX references we spoke to expressed great satisfaction with the level of support they received from LRS. During our own trial, LRS® staff helped us configure the system to meet our needs." This included an on-site visit from an LRS systems engineer for initial setup and administrator training.

According to Phil Neff, the CaTS team can very quickly stage and test upgrades, then move them into production. Adds Wynne: "If I ever need to call LRS support with an urgent service request, they usually get back to me with a solution in a matter of hours. Likewise, when dealing with less urgent





or longer-term issues, the LRS support team provides regular status updates regarding my request."

A BANNER DAY FOR VPSX

Since the Fall 2006 semester, several Banner modules are running in production, with VPSX providing assured delivery of 600+ mission-critical documents per day. As WSU shifts additional mainframe processing to its open systems platforms, the scalability of the VPSX solution will be a key factor for success. "We are confident in both the VPSX product and the people who support it," says Wynne.

WRIGHT STATE WISH LIST

Centralized configuration

"We don't have to physically visit various locations to set up queue access. With VPSX, we make one change in one place and the queues are updated or added everywhere the solution runs."

A vendor we can trust

"We called multiple VPSX reference sites and talked to our own employees who had worked with other LRS products in the past. There was a strong consensus that LRS stood behind its products."

Web-based thin client

"Several other solutions required installation of Windows GUI clients at individual user workstations. The VPSX solution uses a standard browser, meaning nothing to install or maintain."

Print job retention

"We wanted the ability to retain documents on the spool, so that users could do reprints without re-running their jobs. VPSX supports job retention, as well as automatic or manual expiration."

System administration via web GUI

"VPSX configuration can be done 100% over the web. Other alternatives required using text editors."

Instant updates on printer status

"With support for SNMP, the VPSX product will let help desk staff identify printing problems before users start calling."

Support for encryption

"Many of our documents contain sensitive student information. VPSX encryption capabilities were an important factor for us."

Command line control over print delivery

"One of our criteria was command-line compatibility with UNIX (lp, lpstat, cancel, etc.). The LRS suite comes with sample scripts that provide this capability."

Multiple user authentication options

"Since we have multiple UNIX-based systems, VPSX support for PAM (Pluggable Authentication Modules) was important."

Ease of use

"This may be somewhat subjective, but we find that most users quickly learn to use the VPSX interface. This greatly simplifies the task of supporting the system."

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