

Company Profile:

Gonzaga University is a private, four-year university in Spokane, Wash., with 6,300 students and 325 faculty in 92 undergraduate and 21 graduate programs.

Website: www.gonzaga.edu

Business Challenge: Inhibited by a limited budget but tasked with providing IT service to 87 buildings spread out over a 108-acre campus, Gonzaga University's small IT department couldn't keep up with the maintenance required to keep the college's administrative applications up and running. Without reliable access to the systems that run these applications, school officials would be unable to schedule classes, process tuition, pay salaries or conduct the daily operations that run the university. At the same time, faculty wouldn't be able to conduct academic research or access teaching aides. Unfortunately, managing the distributed network was far too labor intensive, making even the most basic tasks a major management pain.

Solution: Gonzaga University deployed a remote and automatic systems management solution from Kaseya that simplifies IT tasks and allows systems administrators to remotely access workstations and servers from a central management console – regardless of the physical location of the systems. Now, basic tasks like issuing patches, updating software, monitoring performance and setting up new employee profiles are done remotely without the systems administrator leaving his desk, enabling preventative maintenance and the ability to identify and eliminate availability, performance and security risks before they become major issues.



Kaseya Enables Campus IT Department to Switch from Reacting to Downtime to Proactively Preventing Downtime

Campus environments are notoriously hard to manage, especially for small IT staffs. With PCs, servers and mobile devices spread out across an area measured in hundreds or even thousands of acres, keeping up with the maintenance required to keep business applications running smoothly requires either a large IT department or systems administrators who are quick on their feet.

"We called it the sneaker network," said Patrick Nowacki, systems administrator for Gonzaga University, a private, four-year college in Spokane, Wash. "We were constantly running around the campus putting out fires. It was labor intensive and grossly inefficient to manage."

Administrative tasks like installing new software, issuing a patch and deploying a new business application took weeks to complete, requiring systems administrators to physically go to each PC or server and manually perform the maintenance. Often, the lag in issuing patches would lead to downtime and leave the network open to security threats.

As a result, the university's administration staff would be unable to schedule classes, process tuition, pay salaries or conduct the daily operations that run the university. And faculty would be unable to conduct academic research or access teaching aides.

"Uptime is a huge focus for us. Gonzaga only hires the best faculty to come teach, and we need to make sure they have the tools they need to do that. Our machines need to be available at all times," Nowacki said.

In addition to the availability issues, Nowacki didn't have a reliable inventory of hardware and software on the network, affecting performance and making the university susceptible to certain security risks. He had no way of knowing what version of Windows was installed on each PC, what business applications the systems were running or how much capacity or memory each had and could support. This led to patch management issues – how can you plan a patch deployment if you don't know what operating system is running? – software licensing inaccuracies and problems with hardware being able to support new installations and upgrades.

According to Nowacki, the biggest threat to the network's security was the college's own employees who install software on their systems – knowingly and unknowingly – without understanding how the programs could slow performance. Spyware was an issue, opening up connections to remote servers that, while typically benign, pose a major security risk.

Automating Systems Management

With an eye on managing distributed systems in the most efficient way, Gonzaga University deployed a remote and automatic systems management solution from Kaseya that gives administrators complete visibility into all workstations and servers on the network from a central Web-based management console. Now, the IT staff is able to conduct preventative maintenance on systems without leaving the data center, instead of simply reacting to

performance and availability issues. Basic tasks like patch management, software deployment, monitoring and setting up new employees are done remotely and automatically in a fraction of the time it used to be done manually.

"We're now a proactive IT department," Nowacki said. "Our time is now spent preventing major issues before they occur, which is a much healthier way of doing things."

Nowacki deployed the Kaseya client on dozens of servers and on the hundreds of PCs that employees rely on to access business applications, giving him complete visibility into and control over any system on the network. Alerts are set up to identify underperforming systems, giving Nowacki a heads up that there could be a problem before it leads to downtime.

Nowacki is also able to write and deploy scripts through Kaseya's scripting engine that further automates systems management. He has scripts that check for security vulnerabilities, scripts that identify and remove unapproved software applications, scripts that add printers to a user's control panel and even ones that set up and configure Exchange mailboxes for new employees.

The unapproved software script works with Kaseya's auditing module to help keep track of all the software deployed on PCs and the network. While the script probes systems for illegal software it populates a central repository with hardware and software inventory, giving Nowacki a complete snapshot of everything on the network. Kaseya then automatically deletes the unwanted software or alerts the systems administrator on duty.

Nowacki originally trialed the Kaseya software in hopes of using it solely as an asset tracking tool but quickly saw the other features and benefits it provided. Throughout the trial, Kaseya out-performed competing products because of its ease-of-use and wide breadth of features.

"We ran Kaseya, LANDisk, Altiris, Track-It and several other solutions through the ringer," Nowacki said. "Only Kaseya actually worked in our campus environment."

Contributing to the University's Mission

As a result of the more efficient remote systems management strategy, Nowacki and the IT department is in a better position to ensure the availability of systems on the distributed network, empowering Gonzaga University's administrative staff with the tools and information they need to run the college's daily operations. In addition, Gonzaga University's faculty is able to conduct academic research, maintaining the school's reputation within the academic community as a leading and innovative organization.

Key Benefits

- Gonzaga's business systems and applications are more reliable and available, providing the administrative staff with the tools and information they need to run the school
- New employees' user profiles, passwords and mailboxes are set up remotely, allowing them to get trained and started faster
- Help desk issues are resolved remotely and in real-time, improving the average resolution time from several hours to several minutes
- The IT staff has a more accurate inventory of hardware and software on the network, improving performance and security

"[With Kaseya], we're now a proactive IT department. Our time is now spent preventing major issues before they occur, which is a much healthier way of doing things."

-- Patrick Nowacki, systems administrator, Gonzaga University

While help desk service calls have dramatically been reduced through preventative measures by the IT staff, issues that do arise are resolved much more quickly than before. Nowacki estimates that the average help desk call took two hours to resolve. Now, most issues are fixed within a few minutes in real-time with the end user still on the phone.

"Not only have we eliminated the wait but we're in a better position to educate the end user about what caused the issue and how to prevent it from happening in the future. I just take control of their PC and walk them through the process while they are still on the phone. That is a powerful training tool that Kaseya provides," Nowacki said.

The improved service does not go unnoticed. In a recent survey that measured each department's customer service, responsiveness to student needs and overall friendliness, departments that in-sourced maintenance to the IT department consistently scored higher marks. Departments that manage their own infrastructure received lower scores.

"Our ability to make PCs and business applications available and performing well is reflected in those scores," Nowacki said.

Kaseya also makes the IT department more efficient. Tuesdays used to be a nightmare as Microsoft released the latest Windows security patches, taking Nowacki a full three days to travel around campus manually installing the patches. Now, through the Kaseya solution, it takes less than 10 minutes. With the time saved on basic administrative tasks, Nowacki can now concentrate on more proactive projects that further enhance IT service.

"Four years ago, IT was a nightmare and was seen by the rest of the university as a department that wasn't doing well," Nowacki said. "Now, it's obvious we're doing a good job and people recognize us as contributors to fulfilling the university's mission."