

Lone Star College System



Achieving Total Centralized Management with Symantec Solutions

Lone Star College System has been using Altiris client management solutions on a per-campus basis since 2004. Results at the North Harris campus include a 75 percent reduction in staff time spent manually provisioning hardware, rapid replacement of staff computers, a 71 percent reduction in the backlog of IT work orders, and 65 percent first-call resolution on help-desk tickets. A project is currently underway to centralize client management across all five campuses to achieve even greater efficiency.

ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Lone Star College System (<http://www.lonestar.edu>) consists of five community colleges and six satellite centers in the North Houston metropolitan area. Founded in 1973 as North Harris County College, the fast-growing college system now serves over 50,000 students.

INDUSTRY

Education

SOLUTION

Client Management

Configuration Management

Doing the right things, the right way

It's been said that efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right things. Faced with the formidable task of managing 13,000 computers spread across five distributed campus locations, Lone Star College System has certainly been effective—and is about to get a lot more efficient.

Located in the North Houston metropolitan area, Lone Star College System serves 1,400 square miles in Harris and Montgomery Counties. One of the largest and fastest growing community college districts in Texas, Lone Star uses Altiris products to simplify the deployment of new computers for staff and student labs. Until recently, each campus handled its own deployments, but the university is now beginning a broad initiative to centralize client management processes across the organization.

A commitment to service delivery

The college system was already using the Altiris® Deployment Solution™ to reduce systems deployment time at some of its campuses before 2004. But when Link Alander arrived that year as the new dean of technology at the North Harris campus, he found that the product was not being used to its full potential.

“Altiris is a thinker’s tool, and it’s very powerful,” says Alander, now executive director, campus services for Lone Star College System. “Because of that, it’s very important for it to be used correctly. Our technicians weren’t investing the time in learning how to use it properly for our situation, mostly because they hadn’t had the proper training. At the time, we had a lot of old hardware that needed to be replaced, and our PC to technician ratio is about 439 to 1. So I felt strongly that the strategic use of a client management system was going to be critical to improving our level of service delivery.”

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Link Alander

Executive Director,
Campus Services

Lone Star College System

By using the Altiris Client Management Suite, Lone Star College System's North Harris campus has been able to reduce its backlog of IT work orders by 71%.

After evaluating competing solutions, Alander decided to leverage the college's investment in Altiris Deployment Solution and move to the full Altiris Client Management Suite™. "Altiris offers a complete solution for client management, not just individual parts," says Alander. "It fits perfectly with our organizational model."

Alander invited Symantec partner Valerent to provide a proof of concept to show what Altiris Client Management Suite could do for the North Harris campus. "Valerent invested a lot of time and brought up a true notification server environment for us to work from and learn," he says. "It was a great partnership to get us started with Altiris products."

Reducing hardware provisioning time by 75 percent

After reviewing the IT environment and practices at North Harris, Valerent provided on-site deployment assistance in the form of a 15-day "quick start" program. Alander also purchased e-training for each of his technicians through Altiris Education Services so they could get up to speed quickly.

"The e-learning keeps us sharp," he says. "We've also done off-site training with Altiris. The training helps us think through our processes and better understand what Altiris is capable of doing."

One of the things it's capable of is much faster deployment of new computers for faculty and staff. By using Altiris to remotely extract an image from an employee's old PC, IT staff can image the new PC ahead of time, resulting in nearly instantaneous replacement. Previously, the employee would be without his or her PC for a full business day as IT staff took the old computer away, analyzed its "personality," and configured the new machine manually.

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SOLUTION AT A GLANCE

Business Drivers

- Reduce staff time spent on desktop deployment
- Improve timeliness of IT work-order completion

Technology Challenges

- Resolve more help desk tickets on the first call
- Monitor patch compliance on endpoints

Solution

Client management and configuration management solution

Symantec Products

- Altiris® Client Management Suite™

Symantec Services

- Altiris Education Services

Symantec Partner

- Valerent (<http://www.valerent.com>)

Technology Environment

- Applications: Microsoft Office 2003, HP ServiceCenter
- Database: Microsoft SQL Server
- Servers: Various brands of servers running Microsoft Windows Server 2003

BUSINESS VALUE AND TECHNICAL BENEFITS

- Nearly instantaneous replacement of staff PCs vs. one-day delay
- 75% reduction in staff time spent manually provisioning hardware
- 71% reduction in backlog of IT work orders
- 65% first-call resolution on help desk tickets (improved from 40%)
- 99% patch compliance on clients

“The North Harris campus replaces almost 1,000 computers every year, and re-images over 2,500 machines each semester in student labs,” says Alander. “When it comes to provisioning hardware, Altiris has reduced our manual labor by 75 percent, which allows us to reallocate staff resources to other projects.”

Improving IT efficiency by 71 percent

The impact on efficiency can also be measured in the reduction in backlog of IT work orders at the North Harris campus since implementing Altiris Client Management Suite. In 2005, the campus averaged 426 backlogged work orders per month. By 2007, the average had fallen to 125 work orders per month, a 71 percent decrease.

Using Altiris to push applications and software updates has also allowed the campus to improve its first-call resolution on help desk tickets. “By using a combination of Altiris and HP ServiceCenter, any time a job is sent to a machine, it is recorded and visible to help desk staff, which is something we didn’t have before,” says Alander. “So if our technicians run into a problem, they can easily check and see if something was recently done to that machine. More often than not, the problem is related to a recent update or configuration change.”

Using this method saves technicians time in remediation and has allowed the North Harris campus to increase its first-call resolution rate to 65 percent, improved from 40 percent.

Improving Patch Management

Patch management was another major driver behind Lone Star’s Altiris deployment.

“We were using Microsoft Windows Server Update Services for patch management, but experienced failure points during patch deployment that were not accurately reported. As a result, we acquired a preventable virus on machines that failed to be updated. Additionally, WSUS’s inability to deploy service patches inhibited our ability to actively manage our environment using one methodology. Altiris’ Patch Management Solution provides ease-of-use download, review, and deployment of all Microsoft updates as well as accurate reporting that allows for reverse look-ups; all from one console” says Alander. “We know exactly what’s going on. Our campuses that are using Altiris for patch management are able to accurately identify which computers are in need of certain patches and what the endpoints compliancy percentage is.”

The Altiris Client Management Suite will also be helpful as the college system transitions to Microsoft Windows Vista, saving technicians valuable time in the migration process.

Enabling total centralized management

Alander is looking forward to unifying the college system’s client management with a centralized rollout of Altiris Client Management Suite. Lone Star has recently hired a full-time Altiris administrator, and Alander is convinced that the stars are aligned.

“Altiris has been a great tool for us so far, but all our successes are a drop in the bucket compared to what we’re about to do now,” he concludes. “Altiris has delivered on what I was looking for at each solution level.”