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LYNX HELPS KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE EARN AN 'A' IN ENDPOINT MANAGEMENT

Tanium Solution Brings Visibility, Accountability to Compliance and
Endpoint Security

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Compliance and Endpoint Security*

Introduction

Kingsborough Community College (KBCC) is one of the 23 institutions that comprise the City University of New York (CUNY), New York City's public university system. It is the only two-year community college located in Brooklyn and it serves a diverse student population.

KBCC also ranks as one of the nation's top community colleges in awarding associates degrees to minority scholars. The school, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2013, serves about 26,000 students per year offering 16,000 credit courses.

In 2011, eRepublic's **Center for Digital Education** and **Converge Magazine** named KBCC the nation's top digital community college with over 10,000 students. Kingsborough's ranking in the group's seventh annual survey of leading schools in information technology utilization has risen from 10th place four years ago to fourth place in 2010, to first in 2011.

The institution didn't gain those accolades accidentally. It was the result of strategic vision, precise planning and a commitment to giving students the leading-edge technology that will help them make the most of their educational experience.

A critical component of its IT strategy has been its infrastructure investment. In 2006, KBCC approached the City of New York on behalf of itself and other community colleges and received approximately \$350,000 to upgrade its technology infrastructure. It was approved and the college today has a solid 10-Gigabit backbone network, a state-of-the-art data center and has created a virtual ring around its 77-acre campus to provide 24/7 uptime.

Situation

Once the community college had the technology infrastructure in place, the next step was finding a way to optimize the management of technology and avoid data loss.

"We wanted to get more exposure [and visibility] to what's happening at the desktop level," says Asif Hussain, KBCC's Chief Information Officer.

"We wanted to make sure we had a dashboard capability to manage the patch situation and address all of the security levels and updates in the way they needed to be managed."

There were thorny compliance issues for the community college to manage as well – particularly regarding non-public information. That includes maintaining compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and protecting that information from unauthorized access.

Hussain started the process by conducting a gap analysis to determine what was lacking with regard to security.

“The perimeter security is very solid so far. In the last six years we haven’t had any major security breaches,” Hussain explains. “But we didn’t want to let our guard down. The gap analysis found potential things that were lacking – and one of those things was the use and management USBs and other external devices.”

KBCC turned to Lynx Technology Partners to address that challenge, initially implementing a product from Lumension to protect, encrypt and lock out USB devices in order to ensure that the data is managed in a manner consistent with corporate compliance policies.

That was the beginning of the relationship between KBCC and Lynx. Once the Lumension solution was implemented, Hussain approached Lynx to help reduce exposure at the desktop level and across the infrastructure. Hussain was seeking an integrated approach to a broad array of IT management challenges including:

- Hardware asset management;
- Unmanaged asset tracking;
- Software license management;
- Outage management; and
- Patch management.

For instance, Hussain notes that keeping all devices up-to-date on patches, updates and security can be the bane of IT managers’ existence. IT departments must determine:

- which devices are running which versions of which programs;
- whether there are patches or updates available; and
- if they have been applied.

Frequently there is complexity in determining which patches or updates to apply; just because a patch is available does not mean that it should be automatically and immediately implemented. It is important to understand the inter-dependencies of all assets, and to determine the impact that patches may have on applications and other IT elements.

Similarly, as the endpoint environment becomes more complex with the rise of sophisticated mobile devices (i.e. tablets and smartphones) that can be owned by KBCC or the end-user, it is critical to develop a unified management strategy that mitigates risks, while providing maximum flexibility to students, faculty and staff.

Solution

KBCC turned to Lynx Technology Partners again. This time Hussain ended up testing Tanium, a solution that provides instant visibility and allows IT managers to collect data and update machines across the network within seconds.

“Tanium can be categorized as a simple-to-use solution that delivers benefits across numerous systems management capabilities including: asset and software license management, outage management, patch management, unmanaged asset tracking and more,” explains Lynx CEO Aric K. Perminter.

“It’s truly a bleeding edge technology because a single server can support over 400,000 endpoints. There is no reliance on traditional distribution points or relay servers to collect data from the endpoints.”

At a high level, the Tanium technology allows employees to ask questions about systems in plain English and get the answers back from systems within 15-20 seconds.

“One thing that is immediately compelling is the access Tanium provides to real-time data directly from the endpoint,” Perminter says. “Asif requires immediate access to relevant data to make informed decisions about events within his environment. Traditional systems present data from databases that can be considered delayed or out-of-dated by hours, days or even weeks.”

With Tanium, Hussain can identify every asset that is connected to KBCC’s network which is not actively managed. The Tanium solution also has a security component, enabling users to ask which endpoint firewalls are activated inside their environment and which anti-virus endpoints don’t have the latest data files. Most importantly, Hussain can keep careful track of which systems house the confidential information that he wants to protect the most.

“Tanium offers an overarching systems management capability,” Perminter explains. “You have asset management, security, compliance and also remediation. So as you’re asking questions, if you see signs of a problem you’re able to create an action to remediate that problem within 10-20 seconds.”

Benefits

The Tanium solution has given KBCC unmatched visibility into the current environment. This enables Hussain and his team to make critical decisions with confidence. He can determine which clients are good candidates for virtualization and/or decide what technology elements are ready for migration to new platforms.

He can also better manage his staff. Rather than waiting for employees to report on progress on projects that affect the technology infrastructure, Hussain can use Tanium to see if changes that were discussed with team members have been made in the time frames that were expected. Lynx is also working with KBCC to define Tanium as the Windows update server and to help Hussain exclude certain unnecessary patches.

“So far, Tanium has exceeded my expectations in terms of what it can do and what it is doing for us,” Hussain says. “Where I sit right now, I can tell who’s doing their job, ensure that critical updates and patches are loaded, and enforce policy.”

An example of policy enforcement lies in password management across the enterprise. Many organizations have adopted PCI data security standards, which require passwords be of a certain length that automatically expire every 90 days.

It is critical to have the ability to confirm that passwords are being changed to stay in compliance with the standard. Many organizations currently must distribute an email asking everyone whether they changed their password, manually reset those passwords, or physically touch each system to ensure that those settings are in place.

Tanium, on the other hand, enables IT managers to ask the question one time, save that question as an ongoing query and monitor password policies in an automated fashion across the environment on a minute by minute basis. So if a password wasn’t changed and falls out of compliance, Tanium will generate an alert so that the appropriate IT and security staffers can address the issue proactively.

“The ability to hold people accountable is a big thing from where I’m sitting,” Hussain says.

Conclusion

Having an overarching systems management capability is particularly important for KBCC – especially in the context of a rapidly changing endpoint environment that is evolving to include virtualization, cloud computing and the “Bring Your Own Devices” (BYOD) model.

Tanium offers the ability to conduct an ongoing audit from the asset management perspective and the compliance perspective. This ensures that the move to a virtualized or cloud environment does not cause the college to fall out of compliance with the corporate standard. It also ensures that the ability to remediate and resolve issues on those clients becomes part of the standard lifecycle management after the migration to a new environment (such as cloud) is completed.

“Tanium offers the ability to capture information from active sync,” Permitter explains.

“You can get visibility around the policies that are being enforced on mobile devices to ensure that the organization is in line with what has been established as the appropriate desktop and endpoint policies.”

Hussain believes this issue will become increasingly critical as we approach a post-PC world.

“As more and more people bring in their own devices. We have to be ready to police this environment and make sure it doesn’t adversely affect anything on the enterprise network and security side of the equation.”

The Tanium solution, he says, positions the KBCC to manage the new environment with confidence.

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About KBCC

Kingsborough Community College (www.Kingsborough.edu) is Brooklyn’s only community college. It is located on a 70-acre campus in Manhattan Beach, on the southern tip of Brooklyn. It serves approximately 30,000 students per year, offering a wide range of credit and noncredit courses in the liberal arts, career education, and specialized programs. Its highly diverse student body represents 142 national backgrounds and 73 main languages. Kingsborough was ranked as one of the 10 top community colleges in America by The New York Times.

About Lynx Technology Partners

Lynx Technology Partners was founded in 2008. Our core competency is providing consultants experienced in the selection, design and implementation of multiple security technologies. We have delivered extensive services including: feasibility studies, product selection, rules and policy development, network re-engineering, installation and configuration, report and analysis template development, post implementation security testing, and performance tuning. As new disciplines and technologies emerge, we create and support practices in those areas, enabling consultants and engineers to “jump-start” their expertise. This systematic approach ensures that Lynx Technology Partners will maintain its ability to reliably support the cutting-edge technologies required by its clients. The ability to rapidly acquire expertise in new technologies provides Lynx Technology Partners with maximum technical agility and is a critical competitive differentiator.

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