Maryland State Highway Administration

DSRAZOR and CPTRAX Saves Department Resources while increasing Controls and Security

Background:

The mission of the Maryland State Highway Administration is to provide the traveling public with a safe, well-maintained highway system. There are seven district offices which cover the 23 counties of the state. The IT department supports 3,000 users in these offices as well as an additional 600 users in remote sites.

The state had been using Visual Click Software's DSRAZOR in its Novell environment before migrating to Windows. With inherent post-migration challenges, the IT staff needed tools to streamline file system directories and server space while implementing controls to improve security. The IT department determined DSRAZOR and CPTRAX for Windows offered the highest visibility into the new AD/NTFS environment. The result was added control, enhanced security, and reduced time and costs of IT resources.

Challenge: Clean Up and Audit Directory from Migration

When the Maryland State Highway Department's IT department completed its migration from Novell to Windows, it viewed the transition as an opportunity to streamline its file system and directories. It needed visibility into the directory so it could document the location and age of files to potentially move underutilized files to less expensive offline storage. Yet it lacked a tool for querying file space usage and directory attributes, or preventing people from saving files in certain areas. The migration was the ideal catalyst to reduce unwanted or unused files while implementing controls to avoid similar space and security problems in the future.

"With our headquarters located in one location and district offices in seven other locations, our IT department was challenged with the decentralized environment," says Charles Markakis, Assistant Director of IT Systems Support at the Maryland State Highway Administration. "Although Novell had some of the capabilities we wanted, it required a lot of overhead to track directories. We needed an instrument that would help us clean up files from the migration, give us basic administration tools, and set up controls – without consuming scarce resources."

"We are impressed with how easy it is to implement both DSRAZOR and CPTRAX"

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Action: Leveraging CPTRAX and DSRAZOR for Windows

Although the highway department previously used Visual Click's DSRAZOR for Novell with success, it considered other directory management software to confirm DSRAZOR for Windows would be its best choice. It found other products to be far more expensive with many superfluous features. Visual Click Software also offered the department the added capability of CPTRAX to track and audit directories using minimal resources.

DSRAZOR for Windows is an administration tool that gives the department an easy-to-use interactive agent to help manage its Windows Active Directory and Audit AD/NTFS security settings. "The customizable interface of DSRAZOR and CPTRAX enables our IT organization to create its own queries without scripting or coding, saving us significant time and resources," says Markakis. "It's quite simple to run queries and perform administration tasks from our desktops." DSRAZOR's Console provides a variety of ready-to-run solutions, or applets, that perform routine tasks automatically. These applets can be customized to meet specific ongoing or on demand requests.

The Maryland State Highway Department implements several DSRAZOR applets in the Assess Active Directory/NTFS Security Settings module. The IT staff also utilizes several applets such as "accounts that are disabled" to transfer accounts that haven't been used for a time to a disabled status. Further, it gives them insight into the total number of User and Group accounts and their status.

"Accounts that have never logged in" helps them from a security standpoint because they can easily see accounts that should be investigated as to why they are active yet never used. "Last login report by domain controller" allows the IT department to see when a particular user logged in and "directory file permissions and owner" gives them the ability to locate data and determine ownership. "Shares permissions on servers and workstations" is used as a reality check to ensure nothing is set out of the ordinary on its file servers.

There is also a Query and Search Active Directory module. The department is using the "document group membership" applet to list group members automatically versus the manual process it was using before. "Find duplicate Active Directory object names" finds duplicate accounts and names so the department can troubleshoot the cause.

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"The DSRAZOR reports generated by the applets give us visibility into our directory for better management, security, and control," he says. "The data empowers us to make informed decisions and accurately troubleshoot issues that may be compromising our security and storage space."

CPTRAX for Windows also offers applets for customized, automated tracking and auditing. The highway department is using the File System Module to track write files and delete files to monitor file changes. "Block file system activity" prevents users from creating unwanted files, prohibiting them from saving non-work related content onto the network.

Results: Preserved Resources and Greater Control

Markakis admits that the IT department has yet to fully implement all of the capabilities embedded in DSRAZOR and CPTRAX, but as time permits, it plans to do so. "One of the most visible benefits we have seen since implementing DSRAZOR and CPTRAX is it has cleared space on our servers," he says. "All of the junk data that was being systematically backed up has now been located and either scrubbed or moved to offline storage."

Markakis says the IT department has also found value in the tracking capabilities and would like to expand it to additional file servers in the future. Instead of spending days or even weeks trying to locate a file or determine who changed or deleted a file, the information is available at their fingertips. "Not only does having visibility into even the tiniest nuances of a file save significant resources and time, it enables us to be more responsive to requests."

The department is seeing time savings in report generation as well. Previously, laborious scripts were required to run even the most basic queries. Using the applets, these tasks can be completed with one click. "You can't put a price on a tool that allows you to respond to a director within minutes rather than tell him you need days to write a script, determine the fields, and manually run a report."

Users are enjoying the easy-to-run queries to generate useful reports on demand. Eventually, Markakis would like to have these reports run automatically when there is more time and resources available from the state. He encourages other organizations with scarce resources to investigate DSRAZOR and CPTRAX. "During times when you are trying to do more with less, you may not have the people with the expertise to write the scripts and coding required to manage Active Directory," he says. "The script-free applets from Visual Click are user friendly and intuitive, potentially taking the place of headcount."

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CPTRAX has given the department added security over the directory with greater control and monitoring capabilities. The IT department can see what files are on the directory and prevent users from saving home files that may affect the network. With the large user environment which includes remote employees, this gives the department peace of mind.

"We are impressed with how easy it is to implement both DSRAZOR and CPTRAX," says Markakis. "Visual Click has been very responsive the few times we have had questions, but the solutions are built in a way that requires little support outside of our own IT department. We are just getting started in leveraging the full capabilities of the tools."

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Envisioned in 1996 and incorporated in 1999, Visual Click is the leader and pioneer in visually customizable computer network security access management and reporting applications.

Network Security Access Management: Our patented Visual Designer Technology allows for customer- specific applications to be developed in minutes rather than days, weeks or months. This powerful technology creates a new paradigm in network security access management. Previous technology either required use of overly large and complex 'consoles' that performed slowly and required product-specific training or required customized programming.

Our technology allows customers to create exactly what they need to control their network security access management without burdening the Administrator or requiring custom computer programming costs.

Network Security Reporting: Our patented Visual Designer Technology allows for customer-defined reports to be developed in minutes with very little training. This powerful technology allows the Network Administrator to focus on the important matters of securing a network. With minor customizations, each Network Security Report can simultaneously be used for Network Security Access Management. Each Network Security Report can also be used to change the Network Security issues it uncovers. This important technology solves two problems at the same time, namely, reporting about Network Security non-compliance and enforcing corporate Network Security policy.

Customer Benefits: Exceeding customer expectations is our number one goal. We know time is a resource that most IT professionals have in short supply. For this reason, our software is designed to reduce errors and minimize training costs, thereby freeing up valuable time to focus on more mission-critical tasks. From simplifying user management and maintaining regulatory compliance, to preparing for migration and delegating helpdesk duties, our software empowers our customers by saving them time and money associated with managing their networked environments.

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