



State Agency Reduces Time to Set Up New Users by 85 to 90 Percent

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Government

Customer Profile

Headquartered in Madison, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) was created in July 2008 and has approximately 1,100 employees.

Business Situation

DCF needed an integrated solution capable of supporting all areas of IT operations, including configuration management and software deployment, service-desk functions, system monitoring, and IT asset lifecycle management.

Solution

DCF chose a solution based on the Microsoft System Center family of products and the Provance IT Asset Management Pack.

Benefits

- Rapid, straightforward deployment
- Seamless integration between solution components
- Increased IT productivity
- Improved service levels
- Superior value compared to other options considered

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The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) needed an integrated solution for all aspects of IT management, including configuration management, software deployment, operational monitoring, service-desk operations, and IT asset lifecycle management. DCF chose a solution based on the Microsoft System Center family of products, implementing Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager 2007 R3, System Center Operations Manager 2007 R2, and System Center Service Manager 2010, in addition to the Provance IT Asset Management Pack for System Center Service Manager 2010. Deployment of these components was rapid and cost-effective, enabling DCF to quickly begin realizing strong benefits that include enhanced service levels and a significant reduction in the time required to complete many common service-desk tasks.



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Situation

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) was created in July 2008 with a mission to promote the economic and social well-being of Wisconsin’s children and families. Its programs were transferred to DCF from two legacy agencies: the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (now the Department of Health Services, or DHS) and the Department of Workforce Development (DWD).

In the beginning, DCF was dependent on DHS, DWD, and the Wisconsin Department of Administration for technical infrastructure support. The original plan called for transitioning much of the IT infrastructure and services from those sources to a third-party commercial provider model. However, in April 2010, after business requirements proved too stringent to support an outsourcing strategy, DCF was authorized to build itself a new IT infrastructure from the ground up.

“We were given the mandate and funding to start completely from scratch,” recalls Christopher Luter, Technical Services Chief at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. “We had 15 IT personnel at the time and were given the authority to hire 12 more—along with a deadline to stand up a data center by July 1, 2010, and to migrate our first 600 users to the new environment by November 30, 2010.”

The Technical Services team designed a virtualized server infrastructure based on the Windows Server 2008 R2 Enterprise operating system and a virtualized desktop infrastructure (VDI) based on the Windows 7 Enterprise operating system. The environment will eventually support an estimated 20 line-of-business applications and 65 desktop applications.

DCF also needed tools that could help it to become highly efficient in all areas of IT operations, including the following:

- A **service-desk** solution for managing trouble tickets, change requests, IT assets, and reporting.
- A **configuration management** solution for managing server and desktop software configuration, image management, software updates, and associated notifications.
- A **system-monitoring** solution for monitoring and for issuing notifications and alerts with respect to system and hardware health issues, changes, and resolutions.
- A **lifecycle management** solution for managing the complete lifecycle of all DCF IT assets, including software license compliance, warranty information, and value information.

DCF could have met some of its needs with legacy solutions. DHS had been using HP Service Manager as a service-desk solution, and DWD had been using IBM Tivoli and LANDesk for its service-desk and lifecycle management needs. However, DCF deemed both solutions to be far from ideal, particularly from a service-desk perspective. “We didn’t see Service Manager or Tivoli as a modern solution that could fully meet our needs,” says Luter. “Neither provided the ability to create parent/child relationships for trouble tickets, group them together, permit multiple people to touch a ticket, track technicians’ time, or create a trouble ticket from an email. Besides, with either one, other solutions would still have been required to meet our remaining needs.”

DCF also evaluated the LANDesk product suite, which, at first glance, appeared to

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offer all four areas of functionality. However, closer inspection revealed that, although LANDesk did offer a service-desk module, DCF was unable to find a single state agency using it; furthermore, it was not available through any established statewide licensing model. Additional due diligence uncovered that the service-desk module had been added in 2008 through an acquisition and thus was not inherently integrated into the core product. DCF was also concerned that certain Java-based technologies used by the suite would not be inherently native to its Windows Server environment.

Even more troubling, the agency’s due diligence uncovered that Emerson Network Power, which owned LANDesk at the time, was expecting to sell LANDesk within six months. “Vendor stability was one of our primary selection criteria,” says Luter. “Emerson’s first-quarter press release made it clear that the future of LANDesk was uncertain, and we didn’t want to commit to making long-term investments in vendors or vendor products with questionable longevity.”

Solution

In the end, DCF chose an integrated solution based on the Microsoft System Center family of products, which help IT organizations benefit from self-managing, user-centric, dynamic systems. System Center solutions capture and aggregate knowledge about the infrastructure, policies, processes, and best practices so that IT professionals can optimize IT operations to reduce costs, improve application availability, and enhance service delivery.

“During a meeting with Microsoft about licensing, we asked, ‘How else can you help us?’” recalls Luter. “That led to a discussion of System Center, which we saw would

enable us to best meet our requirements for simplicity and integration; technology readiness; an intuitive and productive user interface; alignment with our IT infrastructure; and a proven record of reliability, scalability, adaptability, and extensibility. System Center also met our criteria for endorsement by industry analysts, adoption by other state agencies, flexible options for implementation and support, skill-set availability, and vendor stability and partnerships.”

Powerful IT Management Tools

DCF was able to assemble a System Center solution tailored to its specific needs, thanks to the flexible, integrated architecture and broad range of third-party management packs available in the product suite. The result is a comprehensive, holistic solution that provides the following functionality:

- **Configuration management.** DCF is using Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager 2007 R3 to assess, deploy, and update its servers, desktop PCs, and laptop computers. Configuration Manager provides DCF with continuous visibility into which hardware and software assets the department has, who is using them, and where they are. It also includes tools that simplify the management and delivery of software updates, and it helps DCF ensure that IT systems comply with desired configuration states and power management policies.
- **System monitoring.** DCF is using Microsoft System Center Operations Manager 2007 R2 to meet its end-to-end service-management needs. With Operations Manager, IT administrators at DCF have a single, comprehensive view into state, health, and performance data across the department’s network.

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Automated alerts are generated when potential issues related to availability, performance, configuration, or security are identified, enabling IT administrators to address them before they turn into major problems that can affect service levels.

- **Service desk.** DCF is using Microsoft System Center Service Manager 2010 to meet its need for a modern help-desk solution. With Service Manager, DCF has powerful, adaptable tools for problem, asset, and change management—including built-in processes based on industry best practices for incident and problem resolution, change control, and asset lifecycle management. Deep integration with Configuration Manager, Operations Manager, and Active Directory Domain Services makes it possible for service-desk personnel to access information across the agency’s infrastructure to work more efficiently and solve problems more quickly.
- **Lifecycle management.** DCF chose the Provance IT Asset Management Pack for Microsoft System Center Service Manager 2010 to meet its IT asset lifecycle management needs. The management pack from Microsoft Partner Network member Provance runs natively within Service Manager, supplementing its functionality with tools for tracking details on asset assignment, ownership, location, lifecycle status, contract coverage, purchase details, and cost.

Streamlined Deployment and Operational Monitoring

Deployment of the System Center products began in the summer of 2010 and took about a month to complete. DCF then used System Center Configuration Manager to build and deploy its desktop environment,

taking advantage of Configuration Manager branch distribution points installed at each remote location to keep wide area network traffic to a minimum. “We had 250 PCs shipped directly to Madison, Wisconsin, unboxed them onto user desktops, and then used Configuration Manager to do a remote, bare-metal deployment,” says Luter. “With Configuration Manager, we were able to deploy 250 new PCs in two weeks.”

The department uses System Center Operations Manager to monitor the blade servers that support its virtual desktop infrastructure, in addition to the virtual machines that run all other components of its IT infrastructure. “We’re using Operations Manager to monitor more than 400 virtual machines,” says Luter. “Out-of-the-box Operations Manager management packs enable us to easily monitor server logs, CPU utilization, memory use, hard disk space, and infrastructure services, such as Active Directory Domain Services.”

A Modern Service Desk

System Center Service Manager is now the primary ticketing system for all functions within the Technical Services department, including desktop support, server support, and network support. “Even though none of our technicians had used Service Manager before, all were able to master it in just a few hours,” says Luter. “Our technicians absolutely love Service Manager; it’s intuitive, easy to use, and provides all of the advanced capabilities they need.”

Users can submit service-desk requests in several ways, including by phone, by email, or through the built-in web portal in Service Manager. “Service Manager reduces the need to staff the phones for questions, such as ‘Can I get a larger monitor?’” says Luter. “Instead, users can submit a request

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through email or the Service Manager web portal. We’re also reducing calls through the ability to post content from the Service Manager knowledge base to our service-desk portal, such as how to add a signature to an email.”

The way that Service Manager integrates with Operations Manager and Configuration Manager is also streamlining IT operations. “Technicians using Service Manager have access to all the information in Configuration Manager, allowing them to get a quick and accurate picture of the entire user environment,” says Luter. “They can take over a user’s machine remotely and can just as easily use Configuration Manager to remotely install software or reimage the user’s PC.”

DCF is also using Service Manager to communicate with users on issues such as planned downtime or the application of software updates. “Service Manager is a great communication tool,” says Luter. “We can set up notifications when the status of a ticket is changed, resolved, and so on, and we can follow up with an email three days later. Not only does it help us work more efficiently, but it enables us to track our work and improve customer service.”

Service Manager is also delivering strong value to those who support the department’s server and network infrastructure. For example, when Operations Manager detects an abnormal condition, it automatically generates a trouble ticket in Service Manager, which then assigns it to a technician.

The Provance IT Asset Management Pack extends the value of the department’s System Center solution even further by enabling DCF to capture and track details on asset ownership, location, lifecycle status, contract coverage, purchase details,

and cost. DCF also can designate approved and unapproved software titles; calculate its software license entitlement based on purchase records and compare that data with its inventory of installed software; associate IT assets with volume purchase agreements, support contracts, and maintenance contracts; assign IT assets to specific users or devices; and allocate assets to specific locations and cost centers—all from within the System Center interface.

Next Steps

With its core IT infrastructure now up and running smoothly, the DCF Technical Services team is turning its attention to the work that remains, such as migrating additional legacy applications from other agencies into its own IT infrastructure. Fortunately, it now has all the tools needed to deploy and support those applications. “Moving forward, we’ll use Configuration Manager for all desktop and server imaging, reimaging, and software updates,” says Luter. “We’ll also deploy additional Operations Manager management packs from Microsoft—and potentially from third-parties—to achieve complete coverage over our IT environment. In addition, we’re getting ready to deploy an additional 600 desktops; but with System Center already in place, that’ll be easy.”

Benefits

Through its choice of Microsoft System Center components and the Provance IT Asset Management Pack, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families is benefiting from an integrated IT management solution. Deployment of System Center software was rapid and straightforward, so the DCF Technical Services department was able to quickly begin using it to support the deployment of other elements of its IT infrastructure. Today, IT personnel are taking advantage of the comprehensive functionality and

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Jason Manville, Workstation Support Lead, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

seamless integration of the System Center products to work more productively and provide superior customer service.

“The benefits of what we’ve implemented are being enjoyed on a daily basis,” says Maytee Aspuro, Chief Information Officer and IT Director for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

“From a CIO perspective, one of the best things about our System Center solution is the ability to focus on continuous improvement using the provided data. Every day, I receive an email with key service-desk metrics. When I need more detailed data, I can get it immediately.”

Rapid, Straightforward Deployment

DCF was able to rapidly deploy and configure its System Center solution because it was based on familiar Microsoft technology. “System Center was one of the first things we set up, as we knew it would help improve our ability to deploy—and manage and support—all of our other infrastructure components,” says Luter. “It took about three to four weeks to get everything up and running, during which Microsoft and Provance were both very supportive. Overall, our deployment of System Center was very straightforward—well worth the effort.”

Seamless Integration

DCF is deriving additional value from the way in which all System Center components work together. “The level of integration between System Center components is unparalleled,” says Luter. “Service-desk personnel can access information from Configuration Manager through Service Manager, take control of the user’s system remotely, and, if needed, use Configuration Manager to remotely reimagine it—all from within a single interface. We’re benefiting from similar capabilities in terms of looking back into our servers, including

comprehensive monitoring, automatic trouble ticket generation, and the means to reimagine a server remotely. Regardless of the role of each member of our IT team, System Center puts all the needed tools and capabilities at their fingertips.”

Increased IT Productivity

The Technical Services department is experiencing increased productivity, with the time required for many routine service-desk tasks significantly reduced.

“Reimaging a PC used to take three hours, and now it takes about 45 minutes,” says Jason Manville, Workstation Support Lead in the DCF Technical Services department. “Setting up a new user used to take 20 hours of effort, and it now takes two or three. Password resets can also be completed in a fraction of the time they used to take, enabling users to get back to work that much more quickly. These are just a few of the ways that System Center is helping us to do more with less while delivering improved service levels.”

Luter adds, “Through the capabilities provided by System Center, we’re able to do more with less, delivering top-quality service with a very limited amount of IT resources. We’re a team of a few dozen people supporting 1,100 users in 17 locations across the state, and, thanks to System Center, we’re able to appear to those users as a much larger organization than we actually are.”

Improved Service

The System Center solution has helped the Technical Services department improve service in other ways, too. “In the past, when we were dependent on legacy agencies, users were supported by three different service desks, and trouble tickets were often lost in all the confusion,” says Manville. “Today, as users move to our new IT infrastructure, they have a single source

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Wisconsin Department of Children and
Families

for service, which they can access on the web, through email, or by phone. Regardless of how they enlist our aid, they get rapid, comprehensive service, delivered in a way that’s easier on both the user and the technician.”

Russell Brudos, Technical Services Lead for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, echoes Luter’s sentiment. “The level of integration and user experience provided by System Center, including that provided to IT personnel, are both top-notch. We can easily work with users, and they can see into the process as we work to resolve their issues. We can just as easily see into our own servers, in a way that puts information where it’s needed and makes the process transparent to all.”

Brudos also attributes strong user satisfaction to the fact that users are now more self-sufficient. “By making features such as the Service Manager knowledge base directly available to users, we’re able to help them become more engaged in solving their own issues,” he says. “Our current user base used to generate approximately 1,200 trouble tickets per month. Now they generate about one-third that amount—a decrease attributable to how we’ve been able to use System Center to make our entire environment more stable, robust, and supportable.”

Superior Value

The cost of the department’s System Center solution compared to the alternatives considered is just as compelling as the functionality it provides. “LANDesk came closest in terms of functionality, but a complete solution based on LANDesk would have still cost more than System Center—without delivering anywhere near the same breadth of utility,” says Luter. “With System Center, everything just works—and works together—to deliver an improved experience for both users and IT personnel.”

For More Information

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For more information about Provance, visit the website at:

www.provance.com

For more information about the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, visit the website at:

dcf.wi.gov

Microsoft System Center

System Center solutions help IT pros manage the physical and virtual information technology (IT) environments across data centers, client computers, and devices. Using these integrated and automated management solutions, IT organizations can be more productive service providers to their businesses.

For more information on Microsoft System Center please visit:

www.microsoft.com/systemcenter

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Windows Server 2008 R2 Enterprise
 - Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager 2007 R3
 - Microsoft System Center Operations Manager 2007 R2
 - Microsoft System Center Service Manager 2010
- Windows 7 Enterprise

Hardware

- HP BladeSystem c7000 enclosures
- HP ProLiant BL460c blade servers

Third-Party Software

- Provance IT Asset Management Pack for Microsoft System Center Service Manager 2010

Partners

- Provance