Academy expands IT infrastructure with support from Paessler's PRTG Network Monitor

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>
> James Preston, ICT Network Manager

The academy's IT team were already monitoring their network using Mutiny, but after a major hardware upgrade they found that the product's features were too limited for their needs.

"As our infrastructure became larger and more sophisticated, it was increasingly hard to keep a handle on exactly what was going on in the network," says James Preston, ICT Network Manager at Oxford Spires Academy. "In addition to nine brand new IT labs, we have been gradually equipping all of the classrooms with SMART boards and ensuring that all the teachers have portable access to our ICT Services through a Tablet PC (iPad or Windows) or a Laptop. So as you can imagine, we have an awful lot of different devices to keep track of."

Introducing PRTG

With the academy and its classrooms becoming more and more reliant on technology during lessons, it is vital for the academy that the IT department keeps the network up and running so that lessons can continue with minimum disruption to the timetable. "We had been doing some fairly basic monitoring of our network when it was still quite small, but as we replaced the hardware we found that we simply didn't know enough about what our growing infrastructure looked like, which could have led to problems down the line," says James.

"We were adding devices that we hadn't attempted to monitor before, like IP phones and new multifunction printers, and we found that Mutiny didn't have the features that we needed to do the job with our new kit," says James. "After switching to PRTG, we were able to monitor all of our network devices for any information we wanted."

"I had heard about PRTG from other network managers, so we decided to investigate it as an alternative solution, and you could tell immediately that there was a lot more of the detail we needed to keep an eye on the network effectively," adds James.

Detecting problems in the network

The IT team are also responsible for ensuring the academy's intranet is always live, even outside of traditional school hours. Oxford Spires students are expected to log onto the intranet whilst at home, to access information related to their lessons and upload their homework. According to James, any failure of the system outside of traditional school hours would significantly disrupt student's learning. "Network monitoring is really important in this new setup we have introduced that allows the students to work from home," he explains.

PRTG NETWORK MONITOR

"PRTG acts as a status dashboard, which allows us to check up on the network in near real-time, picking up on potential problems before they happen so any disruption to the intranet is minimised."

After installing PRTG, the IT team were able to identify that a section of the network was only being supported by copper wire, which wasn't anywhere near a high enough capacity for the school to use. It was replaced with fibre optic cable and performance improved as a result. James explains: "It is often the little things that make a lot of difference to how your network performs. We were impressed that there was no loss of granularity with PRTG, no matter how far you drilled down into the data, and we were able to start making helpful changes very quickly."

Saving time and money

With students reliant on the network outside of working hours, James and his team need to be able to successfully manage surges in demand. "Due to these new usage patterns, we are getting spikes in traffic at different times and we have to compensate for that. Now, we get a big drop off for the school run when everybody leaves, and a big surge a couple of hours later when people start to log back on and continue their work," says James.

As a result of being able to manage demand effectively using PRTG, James explains that the school can get far more value out of its bandwidth by knowing what the peaks are and when they are going to happen. "This way we can have just the right capacity, rather than paying too much for capacity we don't need or risking downtime by having too little," he adds.

James and the team have identified a number of other ways that PRTG can be used to save time and money quickly. As he explains: "For example, our reprographics department use PRTG to keep an eye on how much paper there is available in their 12 multifunction printers, and which printers need to be re-filled. But they are also able to determine how much has been used over time using historical information. This allows the department to spend their budget more wisely and only buy as much stock as they need using a custom SNMP trap we created."

Endless possibilities

Looking to the future, James has plans to utilise more of the software's capabilities. "We already have plans to monitor the health of our internal email clients using the Email Round-Trip sensors; we're also planning to marry the product up with our service manager Microsoft System Centre to give us a central location to monitor all our tickets from," he explains. "There are plenty of customisation options too; for example the custom SNMP sensor for the printers that we've already created."

Based on his experience with the network monitor, James has already recommended PRTG to peers and on his blog. "I have found it to be an invaluable tool for monitoring the infrastructure that, when combined with the maps, can really change the way you see your network and how it operates," he explains.

ABOUT PAESSLER AG

Paessler AG leads the industry in providing the most powerful, affordable and easy-to-use network monitoring and testing solutions. The company's suite of just-right software products deliver peace of mind, confidence and convenience for businesses of all sizes – from Small Office/Home Office (SOHO) to large enterprises, including more than 70% of the Fortune 100 companies. Based in Nuremberg, Germany, Paessler's global reach includes more than 150,000 active installations of its products. Founded in 1997, Paessler AG remains a privately held company and is recognized as both a member of the Cisco Developer Network and a VMware Technology Alliance Partner.

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ABOUT OXFORD SPIRES

Oxford Spires is a academy, which opened in 2011, that primarily serves the East of Oxford. The school educates 800 pupils between years 7 and 14, and employs around 116 members of staff.

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