

Low-cost computing for education

NComputing helps Palm Beach Community College overcome budget freeze

Challenge

Meet the growing demand for computer access while cutting costs and reducing IT maintenance and support.

Solution

Deploy the NComputing L-series across multiple campuses.

Impact

Cut hardware costs and significantly reduced deployment and support costs.

When Florida adopted an open-door admissions policy, community college enrollment surged by more than 50,000 students in one year. Palm Beach Community College (PBCC), the state's largest community college system, saw its own student population jump by 5% (to more than 45,000). At the same time, the state of Florida projected education budget cuts of 4% to 10%, forcing a freeze on major equipment purchases. With PCs now integral to higher education and office functions, PBCC faced a severe challenge in meeting demand for computing access for both its staff and growing student population.



Palm Beach Community College has installed NComputing across multiple campuses.

Stretched budgets, strained staff

"In recent years, the number of computers supported by our IT staff has grown from 2,000 to 4,800 on four campuses," said Michael Merker, director of technology infrastructure for PBCC. "Our IT budget didn't grow at the same pace, and our 12 IT staff members are increasingly stretched. We had a goal of replacing our computers every three years to stay current with technology, but with \$1.25 million in cuts planned for PBCC's budget, we needed a new approach."

PBCC had previously used a traditional desktop architecture of 1 PC per person. But setting up and supporting all of the computers was very time-consuming for IT staff.

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MICHAEL MERKER
DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY
INFRASTRUCTURE
PALM BEACH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

“We have 50 stations for computer-based testing in our nursing education testing center alone. With traditional PCs, setting up that many stations would have taken us a massive amount of time. NComputing showed us how its desktop virtualization solution could dramatically cut both our equipment costs and the time and effort we devote to desktop deployment and support,” added Mr. Merker.

Substantial savings, simplified support

The NComputing solution is based on the simple fact that today’s PCs are so powerful that the vast majority of applications only use a small fraction of the computer’s capacity. NComputing’s virtualization software and hardware tap this unused capacity so multiple students can share it simultaneously. That translates to four times the number of students having computer access for the same money.

NComputing virtualization software works with standard Windows and Linux computers, with each student’s monitor, keyboard, and mouse connected to the shared PC via a small and highly reliable NComputing access device. The device itself has no CPU, memory, or moving parts.

NComputing showed PBCC how deploying a ratio of six NComputing L-series to one PC (for a total of seven seats) would cut purchase costs by 50% and dramatically reduce support and maintenance costs.

Standardizing on NComputing

“The NComputing devices were incredibly easy to set up,” said Mr. Merker. “Deployment took less than 15 minutes per station to set up both the hardware and the software in our nursing education testing center. With six NComputing devices to one PC, our school saved about \$50,000 on that installation alone. Better yet, installing a new test or application, or performing other maintenance takes us a fraction of the time it used to.”

PBCC has also reduced its carbon footprint and energy costs because NComputing access devices consume as little as 1 watt per user, versus 110 watts for a PC. Because the NComputing devices generate almost no heat, energy costs for air conditioning have also been cut.

“A cyber café using NComputing at our Lake Worth campus has been very well received,” Merker added. “Since USB memory sticks are now the standard for portable memory, the NComputing devices’ built-in USB port make them the perfect solution. We are standardizing on NComputing, and will deploy them to all areas where we have large concentrations of PCs used for office applications and Internet browsing. We’ll then deploy NComputing across all of our campuses. It’s a no brainer.”

