Career Education Corporation eliminates software license audit risks

Centralizing application and hardware asset management with IBM BigFix solution

Overview

The need

Career Education Corporation (CEC) used a fragmented endpoint management system to track thousands of endpoints at 80 campuses and 10 offices. It needed to centrally manage software and hardware assets.

The solution

CEC selected the IBM® BigFix® solution as its software asset management tool and extended it to hardware asset management, patching, antivirus updating and laptop encryption.

The benefit

By replacing manual patching, testing, deploying and remediating processes for more than 20,000 endpoints, CEC gained the visibility and control necessary to confirm software and security compliance.

Career Education Corporation (CEC) offers doctoral, master's, bachelor's and associate degrees as well as diploma and certificate programs to more than 75,000 students across the world online, through its campuses and in a hybrid environment.

Needing visibility into a distributed and complex endpoint environment

To enforce software license agreements and generate revenue, software vendors have increased their software license audits over the past several years. In fact, one major provider announced its intention to perform nearly 30,000 audits over the next two years.

When three software vendors made software license review requests to CEC, the company realized its fragmented, best-of-breed endpoint management system was not up to the task. This left it exposed to a range of risks, most notably software license noncompliance penalties of as much as USD150,000 per infraction.

"Managing endpoints in our classrooms with BigFix allows us to validate that the computers being used by our students are safe and secure with the proper applications installed," says Jeff Lemke, director of IT site operations, Career Education Corporation. "This has helped ensure a positive student experience."

Solution components

Software
- IBM® BigFix®

"We needed to know what software and what versions of that software were deployed and if we were properly licensed," says Jeff Lemke, director of IT site operations for CEC. "We have over 80 campuses, as well as 10 corporate offices, and we didn't have a centralized endpoint management tool in place. We lacked overall visibility into our hardware and software assets and the ability to manage them. Typically, we'd ask people at each location to do physical counts of computers and software, which might take weeks, and even then the information was hard to verify."

Inadequate software asset management control increased financial liability and elevated the company's exposure to security and performance risks because CEC could not reliably push updates, patches, antivirus protection and other applications to more than 20,000 endpoints.

Standardizing endpoint management enterprise wide

Adding even more complexity was a mixed operating system (OS) environment, along with the wide variation in endpoint connectivity, from digital signal 3 (DS3) service at some CEC offices to at-home employees working on a virtual private network (VPN).

"We couldn't centrally manage many of our endpoints because of bandwidth issues, so in the case of antivirus updates, for instance, campuses would either set up their own antivirus management server or do it over the Internet," recalls Lemke. "As a result, we didn't have an enterprise-wide view into the current status of antivirus. So, while software audits initially drove our search for a new solution, we discovered that we needed endpoint management consistency throughout the entire enterprise. IBM BigFix provided all that in a single tool."

By implementing the IBM BigFix solution, CEC gained a highly scalable solution for everything from hardware asset management and patching to desktop imaging. With some customization, CEC also delivered encryption software over the network to company laptops and could verify a laptop's encryption if it were stolen. This verification was extremely important given the strict regulations for protecting student information.

CEC has deployed the BigFix solution throughout their enterprise, and currently manages over 20,000 endpoints in its schools, corporate offices, data centers, online recruiting centers and remote user locations.

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"The infrastructure changes required to implement the solution and the time it took to deploy the client were both very minimal. The fast implementation helped us meet our project deadlines" says Lemke. "Additionally, managing endpoints in our classrooms with BigFix allows us to validate that the computers being used by our students are safe and secure with the proper applications installed. This has helped ensure a positive student experience."

Centralizing updates and patches for mixed OS environment

Lemke credits the solution's unified platform as one reason it fit easily into the company's mixed Microsoft Windows-Mac OS environment and multi-device—such as laptops, desktops and servers—environment. "Instead of using four different solutions to monitor the Windows patching and the antivirus, for example, everything is simplified with BigFix. All updates can now be created and deployed from a central interface to all affected endpoints. With other solutions, the overhead required just to deploy one update at 90 locations was a full-time job for one person, and once he was done with that he'd have to do it again for the next update."

Decreasing software license costs through unprecedented endpoint visibility

The BigFix solution acts as a guard against over-purchasing software and deploying unused software. For instance, the solution helped Words of Wisdom, the student bookstore that processes the textbook and software needs of online CEC students, move from estimating the number of Microsoft product licenses it needed to precisely quantifying actual demand for licenses. As a result, says Lemke, "We reduced our total Microsoft Visio and Microsoft Project license expenditures by 92 percent."

Enterprise-wide, CEC ensures the proper quantity of licenses are purchased by compiling software license inventories and contract verifications with the BigFix solution, rather than contracting with an outside party to perform onsite audits at each campus.

The bottom line, says Lemke, is this: "Our BigFix software environment has worked from day one, providing something we've never had before: real-time, complete visibility into our highly distributed, mixed IT environment and total confidence that the data we have is accurate and up-to-date."

Take the next step

To learn more about the IBM BigFix solution, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: **ibm.com**/security/bigfix

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