



Cricket Eliminates Need for Hands-On Application and Patch Deployment

Company Realizes Significant Cost and Time Savings with System Center Configuration Manager

Cricket (a brand of Leap Wireless International, Inc.) offers flat rate wireless voice and data services nationally through company owned stores, dealers and retailers.

Background

Faced with the need to upgrade their Windows XP desktop environment to Windows 7, Cricket wanted a way to seamlessly standardize and manage this process, and put in an all-encompassing patch and application deployment solution to support 4,500 machines across the nation. "We were really looking at ways to manage our overall environment, especially software – that's one of the areas we had some real struggles with," said Sean Gordon, Cricket IT enterprise operations manager.

Part of the impetus behind this initiative was the lack of hands-on high-level desktop support personnel to handle the needs of retail locations across the nation. "We wanted to be progressive, but were dealing with a very distributed environment," shared Gordon. "We had to eliminate as much of the physical touch whenever and wherever necessary."

Implementation

Cricket partnered with Catapult Systems to create and implement a solid configuration and patch solution. The original project scope encompassed Cricket's back office and administrative personnel; about 3,200 machines in about 100 locations.

With the need to image machines without touching them, the team turned to application virtualization and System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) to deploy software.

"Our issue was finding a way to maintain user data, wipe the whole system and then re-install the data all over a WAN," said Michael Vrabel, Catapult Systems managing consultant. "We had to plan for every contingency." Gordon added, "We built a single image that we laid down with standard applications – those core applications are built into the imaging process which saves time overall. We don't have to install Office, for example – it's already there and we can add updates at a later point." Cricket also used Windows Server Update Services (WSUS) to push patches and tweaks to the operating system, and group policy objects (GPOs) to manage the desktop settings. With this in place images could now be easily updated and pushed to machines

for automatic updates. Additionally, virtual applications were tied to a user's account so if they got a new machine the applications would automatically install.

Results

The benefits of this solution have quickly become apparent. With SCCM's task sequencing capabilities Cricket has been able to reduce the number of images they have to maintain from 30 to just three – a Windows 7 32-bit, 64-bit and legacy Windows XP. "It's like a layer cake," said Gordon. "Configuration Manager knows what kind of machine it is, and what software and patches are needed. It keeps the operating system by itself and then adds on the other needed layers, which allows us the flexibility to be machine independent."

Cricket has also realized significant time and cost savings. They now have the ability to push an operating system to a desktop anywhere in their environment, unlike the previous process which required that the machine be returned to IT for re-imaging with Ghost. According to Gordon, this and other solution benefits have enabled them to reduce image times from up to four hours to just 1.5 hours, and that includes transferring user data and testing.

"We were able to be aggressive and increase the success ratio of deployment along the way," stated Gordon. "That success allowed us to open our scope to the retail machines, bringing our total intended deployment to 4,500 clients. I attribute that to the team and technology – before we wouldn't have looked to upgrade our retail environment so quickly."