

Nominee: College of North West London

Nomination title: College of North West London scale with Dell

College of North West London (CNWL) has made a significant investment in IT over the past five years in an effort to reduce costs whilst supporting future development projects. Storage plays a massive part in this process, underpinning many of the college's crucial operations, such as the college's email system, SQL databases, virtual environment and CCTV.

With its existing EMC-based storage infrastructure reaching the end of its lifecycle, the CNWL wanted to move towards a scalable, flexible solution that wouldn't require the expensive 'rip and replace' upgrades every three to five years that were impacting the school's total cost of ownership.

"Our storage requirements are always growing. Introducing new hardware every time we needed more space didn't seem like a sensible strategy any more. We wanted a storage environment that we could upgrade quickly and easily, rather than having to replace it at great cost and effort every few years," said Garod Barker, Head of IT, CNWL.

The new storage solution will play a significant role in the college's technology future with the college anticipating an estimated 100 gigabytes of data growth every month. Much of this will come from the college's drive to improve the learning experience of the students and teachers through initiatives such as a paperless environment. As a result, a responsive solution is a must.

The Dell Compellent storage solution was selected because of its ability to provide a cost-effective, scalable storage solution that allows for the simplified management of data across its three campuses.

By splitting the storage solution across three sites and replicating data across those locations through the storage and virtualized server infrastructure, the solution ensures that in the event of a power cut or system failure, the college would suffer no downtime or disruption to the learning process.

Dell Compellent also provides the IT team with the tools needed to move away from reactively managing IT. Offering automated tiering capabilities, the Dell Compellent removes hours of laborious manual storage management ensuring that the most important workloads are identified and run at the fastest speeds. Instead, resource and skill could now be refocused to develop and enhance the College's IT environment through projects that includes the enablement of students and teachers to access educational content online via the cloud.

With significant growth expected, the college was also looking for a solution which would give them a clear oversight, scalability, simple management and strong resiliency in its ongoing projects in order to process activities and forecast expansion. To this end, the Dell Compellent solution offered a variety of software tools - as well as an easy-to-use graphical user interface - to display performance and power use at a glance whilst providing resiliency through Dell Compellent Remote Instant Replay, which provides frequent snapshots of application data in order to recover any lost volumes almost instantly.

Fully understanding the requirements of the college was important for Dell and its partner Splitsec, to ensure that any challenge in deployment could be handled quickly and effectively; "Dell and Splitsec conducted a series of workshops and assessments to make sure they fully understood what we wanted from our new IT environment," said Barker

Through this process, CNWL and Dell were able to identify key needs during the upgrade; "Trying to do it without downtime was our biggest challenge; we didn't want the change-over to affect the college," Barker continued. "Our solution to this challenge was to run both systems at the same time and change settings overnight so it was seamless during the day."

With thorough preparation and technical expertise on tap, the deployment went smoothly and quickly, minimising implementation issues for the college and ensuring that its staff could maintain a consistent service for its students.

With the Compellent solution, CNWL is able to stay in touch with the needs of the modern student and enrich the learning experience; taking advantage of educational benefits offered by mobile devices such as tablets whilst being able to reallocate staff resources that were previously spent keeping the solution running.

"Compellent did what it said it did on the tin and then went on to exceed that as well. The tiering and the automation side of the solution was a bonus for us and that's been really beneficial. It has also been great having instant replay which allows us to store data off-site

and negates the need for off-site backups. With the building of the new datacentre now complete we have taken advantage of this and have part of Compellent is housed here. Scaling into new sites is an area where the data replication really helps. It's a unique set-up and it's proved completely suitable for our needs," Barker stated.

With the new, scalable and automated storage infrastructure in place, the IT team has had the chance to expand on the college's virtualized environment and has rolled out both a VMware Thinapp service and a Microsoft Lync 2013 telephone system, which runs on the virtual environment and allows staff to make calls via a USB. These two projects together have already saved the college approximately £35,000 through the ability to decommission servers.

The resiliency and manageability offered by the Dell solution allows the college to develop new projects and features far faster. "Ultimately, we're here to underpin the learning experience for students. The minimum we need to offer is a resilient system that doesn't go down. With our new Dell setup we never have downtime," Barker continued; "Once the decision has been made to adopt a new technology, everyone wants it done as quickly as possible. In the past, testing and deploying a system could take up to a month. Now, with our Dell-based storage and server infrastructure, we can deliver complex technology solutions in about a week."

From a budget perspective, in addition to the £20,000 saved migrating the solution off physical servers onto a virtualized server infrastructure, Compellent provides CNWL with a clear view of annual, weekly and daily usage; allowing the IT team to plan and grow their capacity as necessary. This feature is particularly valuable to the finance team as the transparency allows them to evaluate their future costs and effectively plan budgets.

Why nominee should win

- CNWL paves way for the future by deploying a combined Dell storage solution offering scalable, up-to-date IT
- CNWL saves thousands on hardware thanks to efficient infrastructure, eliminating physical servers with a virtual server infrastructure.
- Students and staff access new services in a quarter of the time thanks to increased manageability and performance.

- Users receive uninterrupted access to IT thanks to consistent, high levels of resiliency and back-up services.
- Award-winning project ensures IT team can focus on innovation by saving 12 hours a week on management tasks.