The Challenge

Ventura School District was looking for ways to extend the life of their current technology (PCs).

The Solution

BOSaNOVA's Thin Clients are more reliable than their PC counterparts. This allows Ventura School District to spend less time managing their technology and more time finding other ways to improve their large IT infrastructure.

The Benefits

Decrease in support and training issues, less time managing each unit, and a significant cost savings.

"...everyone has seen how the thin clients have dramatically heightened reliability with high accessibility - you hardly ever see my staff in there because there's hardly anything we need to touch in there. It just works."

Ted Malos, IT Director, Ventura Unified School District

Thin Clients Teach an Old School District New Tricks

California's Ventura Unified School District is no stranger to complicated IT systems. With 800 teachers, 17,000 students, and 26 campuses, it's not difficult to imagine the exhausting task of keeping 5,000 PCs in operation—particularly when two-thirds of those units are Windows 98 era machines. Supporting these PCs is a losing battle given the typical hardware, software and downtime problems.

The days of individual workstations are a thing of the past, however, thanks to generous state policies prohibiting the use of computers beyond 4 years, and BOSaNOVA's thin clients. Enabled through a centralized terminal server infrastructure supporting a focused list of high quality electronic learning resources, Ventura is transitioning to thin clients and away from PCs. The school district uses both the embedded XP thin client and Windows CE thin client from BOSaNOVA -- not to overcome bandwidth problems, but rather to drive down total cost of ownership and to help the evolution of centralized and standardized solutions in the schools.

Ted Malos, IT Director, explains, "The State of California is very interested in things like how many instructional computers we have, how many administrative computers we have and how old those computers are. About 5 years ago, they asked an intriguing question, 'How many thin clients do you have?' I'd heard about thin clients but did not have much exposure to them. The question piqued my interest enough to buy a thin client. It sat around for a couple of years and I'd pick it up and show it to the staff and say 'This is what the future is going to look like,' and each year the state would ask the same question and we'd say, 'We have zero."

Before long, however, the thin client became less of a dust catcher and more of a necessity. The more Ted and his team recognized the value of the thin client's longer life span, the more excited he became about

the possibilities within the school district. Eventually, school executives accompanied Ted on a visit to nearby Lemon Grove School District, where thin clients had been successfully implemented. That visit changed how the IT department would move forward in implementing thin clients for the Ventura Unified School District.

> The more Ted and his team recognized the value of the thin client's longer life span, the more excited he became about the possibilities within the school district.

Once school executives began to understand the thin client's capabilities, the idea of system wide implementation caught on and a buzz of excitement was generated among staff and students. The race was on to find a suitable project. Then, about three years ago, the school district had the opportunity to purchase the former Kinko's World Headquarters in Ventura, complete with a 22-acre office park, top data centers and other highly desirable amenities. Now that they had additional space, Malos' team saw the door open on the perfect project. They suggested the building of a training classroom for the teachers using the thin clients, as a model of what could be accomplished school-wide. It was a huge success.

"It's been over two years now that it's been in production, and everyone has seen how the thin clients have dramatically heightened reliability with high accessibility - you hardly ever see my staff in there because there's hardly ever anything we need to touch in there. It just works." Malos commented.

Bolstered by the success of that project, the school built two career centers at Buena High School and Ventura High School,

dubbed the Education Service Center, where 30 thin clients were installed for student use. Those 30 were joined by 80 more, 40 in each of two classrooms at the two high schools, now completing their 2nd year of production. Malos and his team are extremely pleased with the ease of installation and the decrease in support issue.

"And just like the first installation, the support issues have been dramatically less than they would have been with PCs. We're running the same thin clients and we're not even entertaining purchasing any new thin clients because there's still lots of life in them. This summer, 250 additional thin clients will be installed to replace PCs. As Ventura upgrades electronic learning resources on the servers, all students and staff using thin clients immediately benefit from the updated software. Thin clients enable Ventura to increase technology access for students and staff in a way that is highly reliable and sustainable."

> "The support issues have been dramatically less than they would have been with PCs. We're running the same thin clients and we're not even entertaining purchasing any new thin clients."

Malos originally contacted BOSaNOVA and approached them with the idea of partnering with the school district. Their reputation, competitive prices, flexibility and availability were qualities that attracted Malos, and as he worked with them, he came to appreciate how easy they were to work with and how far they would go to please the customer.

Once the school district had thin clients in place for the students, their focus turned to the teachers, asking if a thin client could help teachers perform their jobs better. The teachers were working on 5,000 PCs, about 60% still on Windows 98. For Ted's department, this was a nightmare.

"The bottom line is, the old PCs don't work very well, which creates an opportunity for us. If 60% of 5000 is about 3000, do you want to buy 3000 PCs at $1000 for a total of $3 million dollars? Now if you can do that with thin clients, it's not going to cost $1000 a piece, but more significantly, you're not going to have to go through that exercise again in another 3 or 4 years. And that's where minds begin to open up to the question, 'Well, what do teachers need to do their job?' From that, we now have one elementary school where all the teachers are getting thin clients instead of a new computer. We have another small middle school that actually asked for thin clients for their students. They said, 'You know those things that you said the teachers need? That's what we require.' That's pretty cool. We need to see how that works."

Malos is amazed at the way the school district has responded to this new technology. "Now we have schools asking what they should do to get ready for thin clients. I advise standardizing the printers to the Xerox 3150. They're $400 with a monochrome laser, a network card and a 4 yr warranty. Once you put them in, you don't hear from the people because they just work. It's the best testimonial there is."
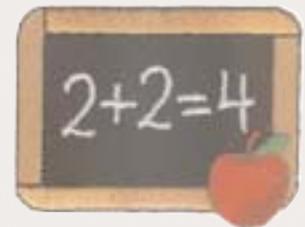
For the Ventura Unified School District and Ted Malos' team of IT professionals, those are sweet words. The entire district has benefited from lowered costs and the healthier network that springs from implementation of thin clients. In tandem with the fiber optic network, support issues have decreased, training issues have decreased, and the school district is perfectly poised to handle the needs of teachers and students comfortably for many years to come.