



Irish College Develops Learning Gateway— Gains Secure Access, Improved Competitiveness

Overview

Country or Region: Ireland

Industry: Education

Customer Profile

National College of Ireland (NCI) was established in 1951, and is committed to delivering academic excellence to its students. More than 80 percent of its 5,500 students are adult learners.

Education Challenge

NCI required a solution that would provide flexible anytime, anywhere access, and meet their demands for security, availability, and reliability.

Solution

Software development work employed Microsoft® Visual Basic® .NET 2003, and in particular, the Active Directory® component of Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003, part of Microsoft Windows Server System™.

Benefits

- NCI resources can now be accessed from outside the college campus.
- Secure wireless access points mean more flexible access to college resources while on site.
- Students and staff now enjoy a secure e-mail service.

“The Microsoft solution helps us to compete more aggressively in a market where the customers (students) are very technologically aware.”

Geraldine Minogue, IT Manager, National College of Ireland

The National College of Ireland (NCI) is a nonprofit college based in Dublin, serving 5,500 students. Its mission is to provide a centre of academic excellence, focused on the changing needs of today's learner. Ward Solutions, an IT consulting and e-business systems integrator and one of the first Microsoft® Gold Certified Security Partners in Ireland, began by building on the college's existing computer-usage policy, to develop a complete set of IT security polices. The new Learning Gateway solution delivered by Ward has given NCI a competitive edge in the higher education market, by providing flexible and innovative mechanisms to support the college and learners at a time, place, and pace to suit their needs.

Situation

The National College of Ireland (NCI) is a nonprofit college based in Dublin. Its mission is to provide a centre of academic excellence, focused on the changing needs of today's learner.

The market for third-level education in Dublin is highly competitive, and NCI's administration is keen to maintain its standing through its fundamental philosophy of access to learning at a time, pace, and place to suit the student. Eighty per cent of its 5,500 students are adults engaged in workplace-based learning. The ability to offer secure access to college resources was critical as a market differentiator for NCI, which also identified a need to offer student self registration through the Web. NCI required a solution which provided flexible anytime, anywhere access, and met their demands of security, availability, and reliability.

Solution

Ward Solutions is an IT consulting and e-business systems integrator, and one of the first Microsoft® Gold Certified Security Partners in Ireland. Working with NCI to implement a solution, Ward began by building on the college's existing computer-usage policy, to develop a complete set of IT security policies. These policies resulted in several organizational, management, and technical controls, which ultimately drove the security requirements of NCI's architecture.

Microsoft technologies formed the basis of the infrastructure solution deployed. Work was carried out using Microsoft Visual Basic® .NET 2003 development system. In particular, the Active Directory® directory service component of the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system, part of Microsoft Windows Server System™ integrated server software, ensured a single authentication data source for staff and

students. It was the key to delivering other aspects of the solution. When used with Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2004, it was possible to:

- Ensure appropriate URL and content filtering rules are applied to staff and student upon signing on.
- Replace an existing Web-based e-mail system, built with Open Source code, with Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 communication and collaboration server, and ensure anytime, anywhere access to e-mail messages by staff and students through Microsoft Office Outlook® Web Access.

Active Directory made deployment of the solution an easier process for Ward.

- Student e-mail messaging was simpler to deploy by using Active Directory and Exchange Server 2003 together.
- Active Directory and ISA Server 2004 jointly made it easy to provide appropriate network access to staff and students.
- Wireless and wired-network access authentication is achieved easily through Active Directory.

Microsoft Office SharePoint® Portal Server 2003 was deployed as the NCI portal platform. This brings together many of the Learning Gateway components in a dedicated portal for staff and students. Future expansion will be a simple procedure, ensuring that a more functional and cost-effective IT strategy is planned and delivered, as the college expands and its needs evolve.

Benefits

The solution delivered by Ward has given NCI a competitive edge in the higher education market, by providing flexible and innovative mechanisms to support the college campus and learners at a time, place, and pace to suit their needs:

For More Information

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For more information about The National College of Ireland products and services, visit the Web site at: www.ncirl.ie

- NCI resources can now be accessed from outside the college, which was not possible until now.
- Secure wireless access points mean more flexible access to college resources while on campus. Students can use their own laptops within the college to access the resources that are available to them.
- Students and staff now enjoy a secure e-mail service.

The improved access has not been achieved at the expense of compromising security demands. Geraldine Minogue, IT Manager, NCI, points out, "Ward has provided NCI with a Microsoft technologies-based, security-enabled architecture, which facilitated our requirements for any way, anytime access to college IT applications in an extremely secure, easy-to-manage, and easy-to-operate environment."

The 'building blocks' approach of the Learning Gateway framework means that NCI can expand to meet its future needs in a cost-effective and scalable manner. The next likely components to be added include Microsoft Content Management Server 2002 and Microsoft Office Live Communications Server 2003.

Windows Server System

The Microsoft Windows Server System portfolio of integrated server software products provides the infrastructure for IT operations, application development and integration, security, and collaboration. Engineered for enhanced manageability and integration, Windows Server System products help reduce IT complexity and total cost of ownership, while improving security, so you can focus your resources on other priorities for you and your business.

For more information about Windows Server System, go to: www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem

Software and Services

- Microsoft Windows Server System
 - Microsoft Windows Server 2003
 - Microsoft Exchange Server 2003
 - Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration Server 2004
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003
 - Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Datacenter Edition
- Microsoft Visual Studio®
 - Microsoft Visual Basic .NET

Hardware

- Dell blade servers and Storage Area Network
- Cisco wireless access point
- Nokia firewalls

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