VIRTUALISED LEARNING EMPOWERS STUDENTS AND STAFF AT KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

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CUSTOMER PROFILE

Kingston University is a public research university located in Kingston upon Thames, south west London. In total 20,000 students and 2,500 lecturers and staff are spread across its four campuses and five faculties.

The university has recently undertaken a significant investment to revitalise its facilities, including a £27m change program to refresh its entire IT infrastructure.

The vision of Kingston University CIO Simon Harrison and his team was to create a university without walls, delivering an outstanding learning experience to students and staff 24/7, anywhere they choose to work.

"In the wake of the rise of tuition fees, students today are no longer concerned with just finding the right degree," explains Harrison. "They see themselves as consumers and they're willing to shop around for the best university experience. Coupled with that, a sophisticated, seamless relationship with technology is part of their daily lives. Kingston's digital services are a crucial ingredient in overall student satisfaction and retention."

Harrison
Kingston University

CHALLENGE

For the past two and a half years, Kingston University has been on an intensive digital journey, building a hi-tech environment for both students and teachers to achieve this ambitious vision.

The quality of facilities and the overall experience delivered to students has never been more important for the organisation.

The university also faces the challenge of delivering a wide range of applications and accommodating a high end-user demand for BYOD. The range of courses on offer at Kingston mean its students and staff require access to around 800 applications, the majority of which are graphics and data-heavy engineering packages.

Harrison and his team realised a virtual IT environment held the key to delivering access to this wide range of applications from any location on any device.

SOLUTION

In the course of their learning, students are encouraged to stress IT systems to their limits, so we needed an extremely robust solution.

"Our initial proof of concept very quickly demonstrated that GRID was able to power through anything we threw at it."

This is particularly important for those areas of the university, such as the specialist labs, that are not open 24 hours a day. Staff and students requiring these computing facilities outside opening hours can now simply access the virtual desktop via an icon on their personal device's desktop.

The university has made its powerful virtual environment highly accessible through a very user-friendly interface. "When users log in for the first time, their virtual desktop is a blank canvas," he says. "Then they pick and choose the components they need, composing their desktop in the same way they're used to accessing any other app store."

"Virtual desktops allows us to make our digital services as open and transparent as possible for end users, enabling collaboration while at the same time supporting our governance and policies to ensure the integrity and security of information,"

Harrison
Kingston University

"As we plan our next refresh cycle, we have a lot of confidence that NVIDIA's technology can support our user requirements and deliver financial benefits through the productivity gains and efficiencies it enables," Harrison comments.

Harrison
Kingston University

> vSphere 6, VMware Horizon 6.11

> Using K1 cards – 6

> IBM Flex blades

> PCi expansion bays on each of blades to house graphics cards

> Teradici cards to offload graphics compression

> Most important applications based on demand from end users: Autodesk, Maya, AutoCAD, Mudbox, Solidworks, Ansys, ARC GIS

RESULTS

Students can now engage with their academic life from any location, whether that's at home, on campus or in the local coffee shop. All they need is a device and an internet connection. This is particularly important for Kingston's large population of overseas students, who can pursue their studies from anywhere in the world.

It's not just students who are reaping the benefits of NVIDIA GRID. Staff have embraced the university's new digital capabilities which support a modern and flexible working style. "It wasn't a hard sell," Harrison explains. "We put the systems in place, let everyone know they were available and watched adoption snowball. Word of mouth turned it viral. Every month people are reporting on how virtual desktops are enabling new experiences and shaping their working patterns for the better."

As a commercial entity, Kingston University is also able to use its new digital systems as a selling point to recruit student and staff. The Ipsos MORI National Student Survey, which surveys all students across the UK and impacts university league tables, includes questions about IT facilities. Last year, Kingston students' satisfaction with their IT experience jumped to 87%, citing their ability to access data and apps wherever they are.

Moving forwards, the Kingston team sees desktop virtualisation as an increasingly important component in delivering its services.

"Beyond specialist design and engineering packages, the graphical requirements of productivity applications like Microsoft Windows 10 and Office 2016 will mean NVIDIA GRID is essential to delivering a fantastic virtual learning experience for all our users," he continues.

"The future of our virtual environment is accelerated graphics as standard."

To learn more about NVIDIA GRID visit **www.nvidia.co.uk**