

Monroe County Library System (USA)

Userful provides key to unlocking IT issues in a challenging library system in Florida.



Background

The Monroe County, in southern Florida, covers a stretch of about 105 miles across the Florida Keys, a popular tourist destination in continental USA. The county's library system consists of five (5) branches, spanning from Key Largo at the north, all the way down to Key West. The system is centrally managed from the Marathon branch, and they have a public computing network of 70 public computers.

Challenges

Monroe County Library System used to have a collection of stand-alone Windows XP computers. They worked fine but were a challenge to manage—there were virus, privacy and security issues. For example, on those Windows computers, sensitive information—such as passwords user id's and browser history — would be left behind after a patron left. Also, those computers didn't have centralized management, so the IT staff would need to physically travel—sometimes driving up to two-hours—to address even the smallest of issues. Beyond just the travel time involved, making changes to the computers was a time consuming affair. For example, to add a web link to the desktop, the staff would sometimes drive a full one hour to the branch in order to add the link which took about 15 minutes for each computer because the system needed to be rebooted to be able to make a change.

As they began to consider new solutions for their public computers, the county's IT team and library technologists wanted to ensure that patron privacy was respected and they wanted a solution that could be managed remotely and easily. On top of this, they also needed to keep an eye on the budget—spending only what was needed to run a public computers with reliable performance. The team began looking at virtualization based solutions due to the central control they provide, but as they considered solutions, they didn't see any that matched all their criteria. Until they found Userful.



The cost savings projected over the life of the system, specially associated with support and management, are huge, and it is where the true value of Userful is.

- Norma Kula Library Director at The Monroe County Library System

Solution

The IT team at Monroe County found out about the Userful Desktop solution at a library conference, and after some testing they determined it fulfilled all the key points that they were looking for. Userful's locked down and secure desktops create an image of the computer for patrons to work on, which is erased after each session logs out, ensuring full patron privacy. The solution's web-based central management console, Userful Manager, allows for a more efficient system administration—instead of driving to the branch, staff now only need to log into the web-console, make the change, choose the profile—or profiles—that the change applies to. In less than 30 minutes they can push that change out to all the machines. All of this is done through the cloud and it means that from a single, remote location, staff can manage the computers on all five branches across the Monroe County Library System.

The team deployed the entire 70 stations, across all branches, with a zero client architecture that allows one PC to power up to 12 entirely independent desktops. Each of those desktops is connected to the host PC via the network. Desktop performance was a key factor in the IT department's choice of Userful. The team had tried several different virtual desktop solutions with either Thin Clients or Zero Clients, and Userful was the only one that could play a YouTube video in fullscreen with reliability.

Results

According to Norma Kula, Library Director at the Monroe County Library System, "Userful is the best system designed for connectivity with the outside world in public access computing. The main advantage of having Userful over their old system is the simplicity of management". She also notes that "...with Userful, the patrons definitely get more computer uptime. The ability to integrate Microsoft Office gives the solution an additional value that both staff and patrons appreciate". As for the the solution's long term savings: "the cost savings projected over the life of the system, specially associated with support and management, are huge, and it is where the true value of Userful is". In terms of savings, Userful Desktop has brought significant savings in both hardware and energy. But most of all in staff time—now they can dedicate their time to do more useful tasks, spending less time driving up and down the Florida Keys.

