

Success Steps: **How to Launch a Successful IT Automation Initiative**

To get the most out of their computer automation initiatives, districts and universities must take a step back, assess their current IT environments, adjust as needed and make important decisions regarding the future of their IT infrastructures.



Kaseya

The nation's school districts and universities are under increasing pressure to cut costs and work more efficiently. In the race to meet both of these requirements, many institutions turn to technology, often purchasing and installing disparate pieces of equipment and software in hopes of achieving efficiencies not afforded by manual systems.

This race to technology has resulted in a highly fragmented IT environment for many schools, where computer patches, security and other day-to-day maintenance tasks are approached from different angles. This setup is supported by human resources and IT budgets, neither of which is in high supply right now at the nation's elementary, middle and high schools.

Enter IT automation – a process by which software manages routine maintenance tasks in a seamless fashion. Time consuming administration, monitoring and helpdesks that eat up an institution's IT resources are handled by the technology platform, which runs in the background and requires little or no human intervention.

In This White Paper

In this paper, we'll look at IT automation from the school district's perspective, and discuss the steps that institutions should take before launching such an initiative. We'll also hear from one school district and one university that have successfully implemented computer automation platforms, and learn what their early steps were and what they would do differently if they could repeat the process.

Taking it Step by Step

Equipment and software management consume large amounts of time and resources. In fact, PC management alone is a major cost center for districts, where IT team members spend an inordinate amount of time maintaining networks and servers, and managing updates, patches and break-fix issues for end users.

IT automation eases the pain of administration, monitoring and helpdesk chores that eat up time and resources for schools. IT departments typically realize immediate time and personnel savings, not to mention reduced licensing fees for software maintenance.

Automation also provides improvements in energy efficiency and security, which in turn lower data center costs. These energy savings go hand-in-hand with 'green' programs and standards that many districts and universities are striving for, and help create an environmentally friendly atmosphere for students, teachers and staff.

Achieving these and other benefits of IT automation requires a calculated approach, both on the part of the software vendor, and for the district itself. Once the case for automation has been established, districts should take a step back and work through these steps:

1. Assess your current IT infrastructure, giving particular consideration to those systems that are currently managed manually and/or independently.
2. Also look at the IT assets that are connected to your district's network, but that you may not have good visibility over.

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3. Once you know how many machines are in place, look at what's on those systems. Your goal here is to gain a clear understanding of the equipment infrastructure, and exactly what each of those machines does on a daily basis.
4. Use a tool like Kaseya to collect the necessary information about your systems including installed software and hardware components by device. This procedure can be as easy as running a utility to determine if a disk needs to be defragmented, or as complex as checking a website to ensure that it's running properly, and serving up the correct content.
5. Through the procedure outlined in #4, you'll be able to collect vital information regarding your system, and be able to move forward with your mission of synchronizing your IT assets in a way that allows for a smooth transition to an automated environment.

Working through these steps will allow you to gain visibility over your district's system, whether assets are located in a single spot, or across various campuses. With this information in hand, you can work with your vendor to determine which of those systems would realize the highest gains from IT automation.

Full Speed Ahead

As your computer automation initiative progresses, you may at some point ask yourself if the disparate IT systems you've been using for years would be best placed on the platform as a group, or if you should undertake the implementation on a piecemeal basis. The answer to this question depends on your district's current IT setup, but there are a few givens that apply in all situations.

When it comes to automating desktops, for example, we always suggest a complete implementation that includes all machines. That aspect of the integration is fairly straightforward, and the districts that apply the automation across all of their desktops right out of the gate typically reap the biggest rewards from their investment.

With desktops, districts can establish policies regarding conformation with certain software standards, applications that can be used on those computer, required security policies and login/accessibility systems for individual users. For this reason, desktop computers being used by teachers, students and administrators are often a district's first candidates for IT automation.

When migrating desktops over to an automated platform, it's also important to have a good handle on software, patching and other features that are included in the machines' software. Through this exercise, you may find that your computer patches are not up to date, or that the machines are running five different versions of the Windows operating system. If that's the case, you may want to consider merging to two, or even one, OS on a synchronized system that all of the automated desktops can utilize.

Moving computer servers onto an automated platform requires a bit more time and effort. Servers are not as straightforward as desktops, and require some additional investigation and auditing before being placed on an automated platform.

Districts will want to understand which applications each server is handling, and what activities need to be monitored. Once these key bits of information are gathered, it will be fairly easy to determine which of the servers would benefit most from IT automation.

Gaining Leverage

When schools automate existing IT systems, the benefits realized range from reduced downtime and increased productivity, to cost reductions and improved user satisfaction. Automated performance monitoring increases productivity and improves user satisfaction, while automated availability tools—aside from the obvious benefits of improving uptime and productivity—also increase user satisfaction.

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These benefits aren't attainable with manual systems that find IT professionals scrambling to deal with patches, security issues and software upgrades on a one-off basis. By leveraging computer automation platforms, districts can establish clear IT policies and exceptions, and sleep well knowing that those rules will be followed.

In the next two sections of this paper, we'll hear from a school district and a university that moved to automated platforms a few years ago, and that continue to reap the rewards of their decisions. Each will discuss the decision-making and activities that took place prior to implementation, and candidly reveal what they would have done differently if they could do it all over again.

Transforming IT Delivery and Management

When Derby Unified School District of Kansas decided to transform the way it managed and delivered technology to its students, teachers and administrators, the IT department looked closely at its computer inventory and devised a rough idea of how those machines would be migrated onto the Kaseya IT automation platform.

"This implementation was a big step for us, so we put time into that early discovery process," says Drew Lane, IT director. "We looked carefully at the machines, and how we were going to get them reporting into the Kaseya server."

Lane says the district also put careful consideration into how IT support issues would be handled in the newly automated environment, with the goal of minimizing drive time for technicians. "We examined what would constitute an on-site call, versus what we would handle remotely," Lane explains. "We wanted to be able to separate the two issues in a way that would allow my staff to be confident in their decision to get in the car, or just handle the issue remotely."

The K-12 school district, comprised of more than 8,000 users across 16 locations, moved forward with the IT automation initiative and today remotely manages its widely distributed assets effectively, providing greater visibility, increasing responsiveness and reducing IT-related costs. The implementation changed the way Derby manages its IT environment and as a result, allowed the school to avoid layoffs in the IT department. This is especially important as fewer IT employees are expected to do more with less than ever before.

According to Lane, the early work done by Derby Unified's IT department paid off for the district. Hindsight being 20/20, he says he would have made sure more team members were trained on Microsoft SQL before launching the initiative. "No one on my staff had ever been a SQL administrator, so we had to rely on Kaseya to handle that for us," says Lane. "Over time, we found that it would have been nice to be able to resolve our own problems faster; it would have made life a bit easier."

Today, Derby Unified's IT staff can quickly and easily log into Kaseya's web-based console to locate, troubleshoot and fix problems within 24 hours. The school district also implemented daily power shutdown routines on non-essential systems and workstations, leading to daily cost and energy savings. Through IT automation, the district avoids the labor-intensive, manual process of rolling out new updates or programs. The system is also instrumental in helping Derby Unified stay compliant with federal guidelines.

"Not only have we drastically reduced the amount of mileage and windshield time for the IT team," says Lane, "but we've gained a deeper insight into what's going on with our end points, and exactly how many of those end points we have. It has paid dividends, and continues to do so."

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Tapping Into Real-World Opportunities

Like most universities, Virginia Tech's most important asset is its intellectual property. To remain competitive, the school must provide opportunities for faculty to apply knowledge in a real-world setting, encouraging interaction between university researchers and business, government and community organizations.

Managing a disparate computing environment spread throughout the world to support a global client base typically requires a large IT staff extensively trained in multiple technologies. "We're a small staff that's typically stretched pretty thin," says Scott Farmer, director of Virginia Tech's Outreach Information Services (OIS), which provides technical support for the university's Outreach and International Affairs (OIA) office.

With a large environment to manage and a small staff, basic help desk issues and larger downtime-related problems took longer to resolve than the organization's business needs required. Instead of being proactive, the IT staff found itself continually on the defensive, putting out fires and trying to maintain some semblance of infrastructure reliability. Staff also found itself on the road, often making on-site visits on campus and around the state.

After identifying IT automation as the solution to OIS' woes, Farmer says he and his team set out to standardize its desktop computer inventory, and the core applications associated with those machines. "Every machine didn't have to be the same," says Farmer, "but we wanted to focus on core applications like Microsoft Office, Flash and Acrobat Reader."

Farmer says his goal was to create scripts that would seamlessly "push" software updates out to all of the computers on those programs, as well as for its antivirus application. User privacy was another issue, according to Farmer, who used software to cull through a list of passwords in use to determine if anyone was still using their social security numbers to log into the system. "A lot of them hadn't cleaned up their computers or changed their passwords in years," says Farmer. "In prepping our system for automation, we resolved those issues and got everything cleaned up."

If he had to go through that process – which took about 12 months from start to finish – Farmer says he'd pay more attention to the cultural issues that can crop up during an IT overhaul. "The technical issues are easy to address and mitigate," says Farmer, "but what do you tell a user who is no longer able to install every piece of software that he wants in his desktop? That's when it gets more complicated."

To universities that are implementing their own IT automation initiatives, Farmer suggests listening closely to users instead of dictating to them. "Make sure there is good, clear communication taking place in person, not just via the computer," says Farmer. "Users will have a better understanding of the business case and reasons for the change, and won't just feel like you're making demands and dictating."

Those cultural issues aside, Farmer says OIS' decision to automate its IT infrastructure has paid off handsomely. As a result of streamlining IT operations, the department is in a better position to manage the technology aspect of OIA's research projects, supporting the university's outreach mission. By automating basic IT tasks and eliminating on-site visits, administrators are free to concentrate more of their time on proactive projects like investigating other technologies that could further help disseminate faculty research results.

A Turnkey Approach to Automation

When it comes to automation, Kaseya's tools are the best choice for breadth and depth of services, plus proven success in the field. Regardless of the size of your district, you can experience the rewards in higher operational productivity and improved service levels through IT automation.

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By implementing a comprehensive and integrated solution with the power, flexibility, and scalability to meet your needs today and expand as your district grows, IT automation enables a proactive approach to improved operations and end user satisfaction.

From software inventory to remote desktop management, Kaseya provides the tools, technology, and resources that make complete IT automation possible.

Our tools are:

- Easy to learn and easy to use: One integrated and consistent web-based interface simplifies the learning curve. Schedule backups, software updates, antivirus updates and more using a consistent automation platform that simplifies IT service delivery.
- Fast and flexible to deploy: Modular deployment puts you in control. Start with remote control, systems management, backup and disaster recovery, antivirus, audit, discovery, monitoring, or patch management, across your entire network infrastructure.
- Affordable: We offer prices that are very sensitive to the buying needs of education IT leaders and our on-premises or SaaS solutions offer schools the licensing and deployment flexibility they need.

With remote IT capabilities, central management and automation of routine tasks, Kaseya eliminates the need for additional resources, allowing you to do much more with less.

Using our solution, your district will:

- Save time and money while conserving energy. Save on license fees and power consumption and reduce the number of on-site visits. Do it all remotely so you don't need to travel to fix a problem. Reduce your carbon footprint while improving IT service.
- Increase end user satisfaction. Implement a proactive (instead of reactive) service delivery model, and systems run more smoothly, with less downtime, providing you with more time to focus on strategic initiatives.
- Increase security levels. IT automation helps ensure your systems are in compliance with applicable regulations and requirements. They perform better and are more secure.

To address the many and varied concerns of School District IT administrators, Kaseya provides the K-12 Education Bundle, which is built using industry best practices and is priced exclusively for schools.

The Kaseya K-12 Education Bundle includes the following modules and content:

- Discovery, Audit & Inventory
- Remote Control & Management
- Software Deployment & Agent Scripting
- Patch Management
- Endpoint and Network Monitoring
- ITIL Compliant Service Desk
- Imaging & Deployment
- Directory Services
- Desktop Policy & Power Management
- Education IT Service Delivery Kit
(Scripts, monitor sets, configuration templates & reports)
- Standard Implementation Training, provided by Kaseya Professional Services
- Peer Support, delivered via a vibrant K-12 user community on a 24x7x365 schedule

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“Kaseya delivers a comprehensive IT automation solution that helps IT managers run entire networks smoothly from one central location.”



In addition, using Kaseya's tools to automate routine IT tasks helps districts reduce their energy consumption—which conforms with 'green computing' initiatives, as we mentioned, and adds money to the bottom line. Kaseya Desktop Policy Management enables IT professionals to implement out-of-band power management—limiting the electricity flowing to non-essential or idle computing resources, for example—without compromising system management capabilities.

Comprehensive Solution

By automating IT processes and delivering comprehensive remote support capabilities, Kaseya lets school districts leverage all the benefits of automation and operate more efficiently and securely every day.

If you're not on the IT automation bandwagon yet, now is the time to hop aboard. As one IT director phrased it, "I used to be in the dark ages, but thanks to automation, I now see the light." We couldn't sum it up any better if we tried.

Contact Kaseya Today

Remote access and remote control needs to be integrated within a single management framework, allowing you to conduct powerful maintenance on distributed machines without putting the district at risk and without disrupting users. Kaseya provides this level of integration, consolidating remote management on a single pane of glass.

Contact Kaseya today for more information and to request a live demo of our powerful IT Systems Management solution.

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About Kaseya

Kaseya is the leading global provider of IT Systems Management software. Kaseya solutions empower virtually everyone — from individual consumers to large corporations and IT service providers — to proactively monitor, manage and control IT assets remotely, easily and efficiently from one integrated Web-based platform.

For a free 30 day trial visit www.kaseya.com/download

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