

University of Kentucky research group uses Kaseya to align IT services to organization's goals.

University graduates from sneakernet to a proactive IT services management strategy based on ITIL best practices.

Managing IT systems for a public university is akin to walking a tightrope a hundred feet off the ground in front of thousands of spectators, anxiously anticipating a wrong step that could lead to disaster.

On one side, you have the need to provide students, faculty and researchers the intellectual freedom to explore their academic interests in an open and independent learning environment. On the other side, you have the responsibility to protect the school's networks from internal and external threats and keep thousands of systems up and running optimally in the face of heavy, eclectic use. These systems are likely spread out over a large campus environment and are being used by users who are typically not careful about the files they download, the applications they run and the websites they visit. But if a system is infected and goes down, guess who is left holding the bag? The IT department.

At the same time, budgetary constraints at public, state-run institutions are shrinking budgets and putting pressure on IT departments to create IT efficiencies.

University Relies on Sneakernet for IT Systems Management

The Research Information Services (RIS) team at the **University of Kentucky** is not immune to these challenges. While the school boasts one of the top research departments in the country and centers its research efforts in a four-building complex in the center of campus, systems used by the department are spread out across campus in 45 separate locations. These systems rely on infrastructure supported by other IT organizations on campus—whether they work for the College of Arts and Sciences or the medical facility. As separate departments, each IT group works for different internal clients, follows disparate procedures and operates under varying security and compliance policies.

The biggest problem, however, is distance. Some of the research department's systems are more than a 45 minute walk each way and require a technician to spend several hours or a full day to conduct a basic task or remediate an issue. When an update needs to be completed to multiple systems—such as issuing a Windows patch or upgrading research software—the team had to fan out across campus to make the changes. Not only was this grossly inefficient, but because of a lack of visibility the team couldn't be assured of updating every system.

"Our IT systems management strategy was pure sneakernet," said Steve Creager, technical support manager for RIS. "There was no way for our technicians to share information with each other or with users. There was no way to check in. Multiple technicians could have conducted the same maintenance task on the same computer. We would never know, and it was a mess."

IT support was done the same way. According to Creager, a user would have to leave a message on the support hotline. A technician would then copy down the pertinent information and walk across campus to the affected system. Hopefully, the user who reported the problem would still be onsite and could walk the technician through the compliant. If a part needed to be replaced, the technician faced another round trip back to the office, further delaying remediation. A simple fix, such as a broken mouse or frayed wire, could take all day to fix—all the while the user was unable to work.



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Office of Research Information Services (RIS)
Lexington, Kentucky
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The Office of Research Information Services (RIS) exists to support the computing, networking and communications infrastructure as well as maintain the technology budget for the areas under the Vice President for Research. The IS staff provides applications programming, database and Web services and server and desktop support and troubleshooting to the Research staff, the Graduate School and the Office of Commercialization and Economic Development.



“Our decentralized approach was like treating the symptoms instead of the disease,” Creager said. “It got to the point where we’d just walk in and replace whole desktops instead of taking the time to identify and remediate the problem. It was easier and involved fewer headaches, but we were just burning through our budget.”

Consolidated IT Systems Management on One Web-Based Dashboard

Creager and the new director of RIS, Greg Franseth, knew that something had to change. The pair demoed a dozen remote management products over six months before finally settling on a service management solution from Helpstar. However, after several more months of struggling to customize and use Helpstar’s helpdesk function, Creager and Franseth decided they had to make another change. They then came across a remote and automatic IT systems management solution from Kaseya that consolidated dozens of disparate management functions from monitoring and patch to help desk and backup on a single Web-based dashboard. Immediately, the RIS technicians had fingertip access into all their distributed systems spread across campus. And not only could they access remote computers, they could conduct just about any administrative task and remediate most helpdesk issues without leaving their desk.

Since Kaseya replaced five separate IT management point products, the cost of the new solution was actually less than what RIS was previously paying, and Kaseya provided much more powerful functionality and integration of disparate management functionality.

“The management functionality available through Kaseya was eye popping,” Franseth said. “Not only were we able to remotely access and control our distributed machines, we could automate many of the repetitive tasks that were taking so long. Things like issuing a patch, updating software versions or changing the network domain name on multiple computers could now be done automatically and in the background without disrupting users. It was a game changer.”

The RIS team now remotely manages more than 350 Windows servers, Linux servers, desktops and laptops from a consolidated Web-based management console. Basic maintenance is centralized through the Kaseya IT Automation Framework, ensuring that maintenance is being conducted completely across all systems in the IT environment. Every task is consolidated on a single pane of glass, so technicians do not have to toggle between management software when conducting maintenance.

“The IT efficiencies we’ve achieved through Kaseya allows us to support more machines and more users with the same resources,” Franseth said. “Instead of calling a support hotline, users can generate and track their own tickets through the Kaseya system. They now have the confidence their computers will get fixed in a timely manner and we won’t disrupt their work day.”

Kaseya Empowers RIS to Embrace ITIL Best Practices

The remote, automated and integrated Kaseya IT Automation Framework streamlines IT operations and enables RIS to align IT services to the organization’s business procedures through ITIL best practices. As RIS builds automated processes throughout its IT systems management framework and creates efficiencies throughout the department, ITIL ensures it is meeting the needs of users from help desk remediation to regular system maintenance. Procedures—such as hiring and setting up a new employee—are now routed through Kaseya, ensuring that the process continues to move forward, changes are recorded and stake holders are held accountable.

ITIL ensures that support functions are integrated with service delivery and information is shared seamlessly across the multiple roles within the organization. This allows RIS to track the value its IT service bring to the university and ensure it is meeting internal service level agreements (SLAs) that are in line with user need.

“Instead of simply running around putting out fires in hopes that systems stay online long enough until they are replaced, RIS now has a proactive framework in place that accurately aligns its services to the needs of users,” Franseth said.

Business Challenge

- Ensure students, researchers and faculty have the tools and information they need to complete research projects on time and under budget
- Provide IT services to a research organization spread out over 45 different locations across campus
- Decrease IT costs while improving the quality of IT services in the face of tighter budgets
- Remotely access and control systems deployed behind the university’s medical center firewall while remaining within HIPAA compliance.

Solution

Kaseya IT Automation Framework



Kaseya Creates IT Efficiencies

A big part of meeting those needs is creating IT efficiencies throughout the research organization. Now, 80 percent of support calls are resolved remotely through Kaseya rather than on site—up from 20 percent before the Kaseya deployment. Each helpdesk technician has three monitors set up on his desk top where they can remediate two tickets at a time, and can easily handle the increased ticket volume. Before, it was common that a help desk issue wasn't resolved on that same business day. Now it is likely resolved within minutes.

"Kaseya gives us a much better grasp of our IT environment," Creager said. "We know exactly what is out on the network, what maintenance has been conducted and what needs to be done next. The visibility allows us to plan better, meet auditing requests easily and proactively manage our distributed systems."

The IT efficiencies extend beyond the helpdesk. According to Franseth, Creager is a scripting machine. Through Kaseya's agent procedure technology, he has automated many of the repetitive tasks that plague many IT organizations that manage distributed systems. Tasks such as updating Microsoft Office Communicator or provisioning a new computer used to take days. Now they take minutes.

Kaseya also enables remote management of systems that sit on infrastructure under the jurisdiction of other IT departments. RIS technicians can create desktop policy images that conform to disparate departments and apply them to the research department's systems, ensuring they are in compliance with other departments' policies and procedure without interfering with counterparts across campus.

"Our colleagues across campus are jealous with the amount of control we have over our systems," Franseth said. "They were amazed at the level of automation we've built into our IT systems management strategy, and they are looking at us—and Kaseya—for best practices."

Kaseya Affects the Bottom Line

In addition to reducing operational costs, the visibility and control Kaseya provides RIS throughout the university's IT environment helps the school save money on capital expenditures as well. As a public institution the school has to conduct an annual audit of all equipment. While RIS technicians previously had to literally walk around campus tracking down distributed systems, the team now runs an auditing report through Kaseya that tells them exactly where each machine sits, who last logged on and what software and hardware components are installed on the hard drive. A process that used to take months, now takes a few days—if that.

RIS can then use the auditing information for infrastructure planning and procurement. While the team used to over-provision hardware and software licenses to ensure they had enough to cover user need, the team now knows exactly what it has in inventory, what is installed on systems and what the need is. Franseth estimates that he saves \$5,000 a year on hardware alone. In addition, RIS was one of the only departments that avoided fines from a software vendor after the company audited the school for using unlicensed software. Kaseya's software licensing tool and auditing module ensured that there were no unauthorized applications on machines managed by RIS.

"Kaseya allows us to support more computers and more users with higher-quality services," Franseth said. "We deploy more powerful equipment. We monitor it more closely. Users are more confident that their computers are working properly which makes them more productive. The best part is that we've paid for the better services internally through IT efficiencies. I just wish we had deployed Kaseya years earlier. It would have saved a lot of heartache."

Key Benefits

- Remote IT systems management is consolidated through a Web-based dashboard, streamlining and integrating disparate management functions on a single pane of glass at a lower price point.
- Repetitive tasks are automated through scripting and agent procedures, saving hours—even days—for RIS technicians
- IT services are aligned with the organization's business procedures through ITIL best practices, ensuring RIS is meeting the needs of users.
- Greater visibility into the IT environment and accurate auditing features eliminate the need to over-provision hardware procurement and software licenses, saving thousands of dollars each year.



Remote Access around Firewalls

Some research computers that RIS manages are in the university's medical center, and because they sit on the hospital's infrastructure, they need to conform to stricter security policies and remain in HIPAA compliance. They also sit behind a secure firewall that restricts the level of remote access and control from most management solutions.

However, Kaseya is an agent-based solution and executes its commands directly from the remote computer's hard drive. In contrast, an agentless solution executes commands from a central server that has to work around the firewall. Despite the robust security and compliance requirements of the medical center, RIS is able to use Kaseya to remotely manage the systems through the firewall without additional configuration or policy exceptions.

In the same vein, RIS is able to leverage Kaseya's agent-based architecture to ensure the management of mobile systems. Laptops that are taken off the network can only be managed through an agent, since agentless solutions would not be able to find the remote computer. Kaseya also tracks all changes to remote systems—such as changing a password or installing a new application—preventing the systems from falling out of compliance with IT policies. Smartly, Kaseya is a light-weight agent that doesn't take up much memory on the hard drive.

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Greg Franseth,
Director of RIS,
University of Kentucky

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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