



Queens College Gets the Royal Treatment with CA Unicenter

By Alison Diana
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Case Study: A partnership between CA and Custom Computer helps the commuter school deliver distributed computing to its students in a timely manner.

Like many commuter schools, Queens College teemed with thousands of students who needed to securely and remotely access courseware housed on the New York college's network.

But the school's labor-intensive method of loading software onto lab computers resulted in neither latency nor high availability, according to Naveed Husain, assistant vice president for IT and CIO at Queens College's Office of Converging Technologies.

Things were so bad that it took the department approximately 12 weeks from the receipt of a request to completion of the lab imaging process, not including testing to make sure the imaging was successful. On top of that, each semester lasts only 15 weeks, Husain said.

"Students would have classes in labs and not be able to get the software they needed in those labs. I wanted to build a stable, reliable network for the college and for the students," Husain said, one that was based on Microsoft's Active Directory.

"The goal was anytime, anywhere computing. We're trying to allow commuter-school students to be able to access campus resources from anywhere," Husain said.

In search of ...

Having sent out an RFP (request for proposal), Husain researched submissions from six developers and their partners. In addition to a solution that integrated Active Directory, the RFP included functionality, project management and training, he said. The college needed a plan to ultimately allow self-management.

And it was crucial that the Office of Converging Technologies' personnel believed in both the technological solution and the partners, Husain said.

"Essentially, when you do a project like this, you have to make sure your network engineers have buy-in. If you have buy-in from your team, you then have commitment to the project," Husain said.

Custom Computer Specialists, in conjunction with CA, headed to the lead position in the race for the contract. Custom Computer, in nearby Hauppauge, N.Y., is a tier-one CA partner, as well as a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, and had worked with Queens College in the past, said Kelly Walker, account manager at the 27-year-old solution provider and integrator.

The partners worked tightly with each other on all aspects of a possible implementation—from technology design to the sales pitch, from the installation to post-sales training and support, Walker said.

The solution provider has extensive experience in serving the technological needs of higher education institutions, she said. For example, the company has held professional development days and provided

hardware and technical services to schools such as Fordham University.

In fact, the solution provider is the exclusive New York state reseller of Infinite Campus, a Web-based Education Process Management system designed to allow administrators, teachers, parents and students to streamline communication, work more efficiently and improve performance, according to Custom Computer.

"We worked collaboratively over many sessions at Queens College and in [Husain's] office," said Peter Welling, account director for New York City government at CA, in Islandia, N.Y. Likewise, Husain and a team that included Morris Altman, director of network services, and Yan Juras, director of systems engineering at the college, met several times at CA's offices to watch the two prospective partners put CA solutions through their paces, Welling said.

The combination of a strong partnership between the two providers, as well as the technological capabilities of CA's solution, helped seal the deal, Husain said.

"CA Unicenter seemed to solve the software distribution and asset management problems we faced," Husain said. "Unicenter was the icing on the cake."

Solution found

Queens College is part of the CUNY (City University of New York) system, which includes 19 colleges and more than 100 research facilities. More than 17,000 students attend the college—and, already, the network includes more than 12,000 active accounts, Husain said.

Custom Computer and CA worked as a unit with the college's internal staff to install the Unicenter solutions, as well as CA security programs, such as eTrust PestPatrol Anti-Spyware. The solution features authentication capabilities designed to ensure the correlation between the classes a student has enrolled in and his or her access to related software-based courseware.

"CA has unified and simplified Queens College's IT operations by automating the whole process—a realization of the benefits of CA's Enterprise IT Management vision," Welling said. "It's gone from a very manual, lengthy process to close to an on-demand solution."

Today, it takes the department approximately three to five days to deliver an imaged system—a far cry from the three months it had taken previously, Husain said.

"We build standard desktop images for the labs and then build packages of software. If an accounting teacher comes to my department, we can quickly build a package and deploy it. We don't have to build a whole new image every time," Husain said.

Although Queens College worked with two partners, the relationship was seamless, Husain said.

"One of the customer requirements when you choose a [partner] is you only have one point of contact," Husain said. "There was no finger-pointing. At the end of the day, everybody wanted to get the job done. We had this one period where we had an issue about how the software worked. We got Kelly [Walker] and Peter [Welling] into the same room—it wasn't a difficult time—and they sat down and said, 'We want to make you, the customer, happy.'"

Whenever possible, Custom Computer and CA took lengths to ensure that they worked on any problems offline, Welling said.

"There's a joint commitment. We don't figure things out on the customer's time," Welling said. "We both spend a fair amount of time at each other's location, doing solution training and product updates. There's a lot of fluidity between our two organizations."

In fact, the relationship between the two companies—which is already deep—could grow, based on its successful implementation at Queens College, Walker said. Already, the duo has presented the results of its work to a conference of technology personnel from CUNY.

"What Peter and I are trying to do is take the work we've done here and ultimately deliver it to every school in the CUNY system. It's a technology conference that CUNY has every year for every technology employee throughout the system," Walker said. "Each CUNY institution is unique, but there are a lot of similarities. If there's any way we can take this success and help the other CUNY institutions, then that's what we're trying to do." The presentation went well.

"It's been enlightening to see how a partnership can have a far-reaching effect," Welling said. "We had great feedback and a lot of participation from the CUNY committee."

Custom Computer—which, according to published reports, in 2005 earned revenue of approximately \$62 million, an increase of more than 16 percent over the prior year—is not a small company. But partnering with CA helps the solution provider pack a powerful punch when meeting potential clients.

"It's great to go in together with CA to a customer," Walker said. "They are a large company, and, sometimes, being an integrator, you don't have great access to a large manufacturer, even though it's so key to delivering a successful solution. With [CA], it doesn't matter what time or day; they're there for us. I think they view us as a reseller and a partner—and one of their customers as well—so they're there, they gather the teams and they get you the right resources, which is definitely helpful."

The relationship between the two companies is not new. Geographically close, the companies have participated in presentations at other colleges and universities. In 2004, two CA executives and a representative of Custom Computer presented the "Data Protection Survivor Seminar" at the Conference on Instructional Technologies held at the State University at Stony Brook, N.Y.

Today, however, Custom Computer and CA continue to expand the capabilities of Queens College's solution, which ultimately is expected to include CA's Unicenter Service Desk and the ability to completely support distributed software, Husain said.

"Their partnership—in working with us, the client—helped them build kind of a kit that they could use as a protocol," Husain said. "The common goal at CUNY is doing the best for our students and making it a friendly experience. The theme is people, process and technology—with technology being last. The idea behind the CUNY mandate was to make education accessible to everyone."

Technology combined with a partnership focused on the total customer experience is helping at least one CUNY school meet its mandate: delivering educational tools accessible to all students, no matter where they choose to study.

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