



CDW:

Large technology provider turns to Shavlik Technologies to ensure its 5,000 computers stay patched and healthy.

Founded in 1982, CDW is a leading provider of technology products and services for business, government and education. The company combines its passion for technology with its “customer first” philosophy to successfully deliver to its customers the optimal solution from a vast portfolio of the world’s top technology brands. CDW is committed to providing its customers only the best products, and its standards are just as high when it comes to selecting technologies to implement for internal use.

Min Ju joined CDW in the spring of 2006 as manager of information security, and was charged with helping the company ensure its security house was in order. Ju’s first order of business was to familiarize himself with the various security tools and procedures in place, and get a baseline of the company’s current security posture.

Following his review of CDW’s security tools, Ju came away dissatisfied with the firm’s existing patch management solution. “It did the job, but when I used it, I found the interface to be non-intuitive,” he says. “And we couldn’t get a lot of good metrics and reports.”

At CDW, patch management is handled by the same systems engineering group that is responsible for software distribution. Ju recommended the group look at Shavlik NetChk™ Protect, which he had used at a previous employer. Ju knew its interface, reporting capabilities and management utilities would be a better fit for CDW than the existing solution. Management valued that Ju had prior experience

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with Shavlik and, after an online demonstration of the product by Shavlik, gave the go-ahead to make the switch.

Time was of the essence because CDW was close to renewing the contract for its existing patching solution. CDW, which itself distributes numerous software packages including patching products, is aggressive in its negotiations with its vendor suppliers. Shavlik was extremely responsive and sold CDW on the value of their technology. “We got the right people involved who could make decisions and we turned things around quickly,” he says. “It was a very positive experience.”

A simple install

CDW has about 5,000 computers on its network, roughly 15% of them servers and the rest client machines, including about 200 to 300 mobile laptops. The majority of systems are Windows-based, along with a relatively small number of Macs. The network is highly distributed, with the central data center at the Chicagoland headquarters, a second data center in Las Vegas and several remote office locations throughout the U.S. and Canada.



Once CDW got Shavlik NetChk Protect in-house in late 2006, it took just a few days to configure it for all 5,000 machines. "It leverages a lot of what is already in Active Directory," Ju notes, including information on organizational units and groups, thus saving time in the configuration process.

Rolling out the product from there was a breeze. Even though the system engineering group that runs Shavlik NetChk Protect day to day had never used the product, it was very easy and intuitive to deploy it to all 5,000 machines.

Shavlik NetChk Protect works both with and without agents. CDW uses the agentless approach for desktops and servers, but opted to install the agent on its 200+ mobile machines. Even the agent distribution process takes but a few clicks of the mouse, much to the amazement of the company's systems engineers. "They were taken back at how easy it was to install the agents," Ju says. "I had to reaffirm it: 'That's it. That's all there is to it.'"

Given the distributed nature of the CDW network, Ju originally thought he'd need several geographically dispersed Shavlik servers to get patches out in a timely fashion. In fact, one server did the job just fine, he says. To save on bandwidth, however, CDW installed several patch distribution points near each office location.

Impressive results

Now CDW is enjoying a number of improvements throughout its patching environment, beginning with better reporting. Shavlik NetChk Protect makes it easy to get up-to-the-minute reports on patch status – an important feature for Ju because each time a new virus is in the news management wants to know

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whether or not CDW is vulnerable.

The reports in NetChk Protect also accurately reflect patch status immediately after a patch is deployed. That's a significant step forward from its previous patch solution, which Ju says took significantly longer to render an accurate accounting of which machines were successfully patched. Similarly, Ju finds the report interface to be a vast improvement, with lots of templates for common reports and support for ad hoc reports on custom queries – both features that were lacking in CDW's previous solution.

The advanced reporting capabilities provided by Shavlik NetChk Protect provide CDW with a more accurate view of their overall security posture, allowing the CDW security team to more easily mandate and enforce stricter compliance to security policy across the enterprise. One example is the company's software development group, which historically was not keen on having its systems patched. "Now we can show them how many missing patches their environment has and what type of vulnerabilities they're subject to. It's given us a compliance stick," Ju says. "Since they're now trying to be more secure in the way they code, I was able to get their buy-in."

On a day to day basis, Shavlik NetChk Protect is also simple to manage, he says. "It doesn't require a lot of babysitting," as Ju puts it. It also provides



lots of options for how patches should be deployed, including hidden deployments, automated or scheduled reboots, and offering end users a snooze button. "It's obvious Shavlik developers have used this product and taken feedback from people who have used it," Ju says. Additionally, the product's integration with Active Directory makes it an easy choice for a Windows-centric environment like CDW's.

The company is also seeing a benefit from the agent technology in the enterprise solution, Shavlik NetChk Protect. When implemented on mobile machines, the agent will "call home" whenever the machine remotely connects back to the corporate network. If need be, updated patches are automatically deployed.

A matter of trust

What Shavlik NetChk Protect really brings to Ju and CDW is peace of mind. At any given time, he can easily find out how many machines are in compliance with the latest security patch policy and quickly remediate those that aren't. And, unlike other patching solutions he's worked with, Ju says he trusts the numbers he gets from Shavlik NetChk Protect.

With previous employers, on several occasions Ju had to refute numbers from other patching systems that reported certain machines were in compliance when Shavlik NetChk Protect said they weren't. "I won every single one of those arguments. Shavlik is never wrong," Ju says. "That's one reason it's got my full trust – it's always right. Shavlik NetChk Protect has gained the trust of us technical folks who have used it and pitched it to management."

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