



Digitale Gardermoen IKS

Norway MSP chooses Shavlik to improve efficiencies in patch management and within a week regains stability, lost weekends and peace of mind.

CUSTOMER OVERVIEW:

Digitale Gardermoen IKS, is a Managed Service Provider (MSP) that was established in 2005 on the initiative of six municipal councils in the Gardermoen Region, near Oslo, Norway, that provides centralised Information Communications Technology (ICT) resources for schools, fire departments, tax, waste collection, child welfare, local election services, and more.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE:

The company suspected that the inability to keep up with patching requirements, despite devoting 135 overtime man hours a month to the task, was a root cause of serious daily outages that embroiled too many technical resources in fire fighting and was putting them at risk.

SOLUTION:

After researching several other market leading offerings, Shavlik NetChk Protect was selected as the only option available that was easy, targeted and quick to deploy. Within a week, Digitale Gardermoen reintroduced network stability and eliminated the overtime hours by automating with Shavlik NetChk Protect.

BENEFITS:

- Easy and fast to implement and administer
- Visibility to diagnose issues as they occur and set priorities
- Innovative use of Virtualisation supported with offline as well as online management
- Freed up resources to focus on key initiatives vs. fire fighting
- ROI realised within two weeks: costs slashed to 28 weekday hours from 135 weekend hours

The result of a strategic decision to adopt a common IT strategy across six municipalities, managed service provider Digitale Gardermoen developed a reputation for being innovative and highly efficient, in part, due to their strategic use of virtualisation. For example, they have established an inventory of offline virtual images representing standard builds that allow them to get new services up and running quickly. Or, in the case of temporary requirements, such as supporting elections, the appropriate virtual resources can be stored offline to be reused as required.

Their effort was nearly undermined however when the company started experiencing significant daily outages and had to devote considerable resources to fire fighting, while struggling to diagnose the cause. "There was a lot of guesswork as we were unable to develop a clear picture of what was causing the problems. Despite significant effort we found we were also falling behind on the patching and updates, which meant we were running with a lot of risk; more than our management was willing to accept," says Kim A. Borgeteien, Digitale Gardermoen's Chief Security Officer.

Their team of 16 who were responsible for maintenance became overwhelmed by the maintenance burden of its portfolio as they relied on the free management and update tools from their technology vendors. When it came to patch management and the ever-increasing level of alerts released on Patch Tuesday, nine of its technicians had to work a day's overtime every other weekend, about 135 man hours per month or the equivalent of one person working on patching for the entire month. They were using a disjointed approach, armed with the free WSUS patch management tool from Microsoft and the update features of the software to manage 150 physical servers and 220 virtual servers in the data centre. Non-Microsoft programs had to be patched manually, and the offline-stock of virtual servers were not covered by the regular updates. They had to be patched as they were powered into service.



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Driven by concern over the mounting security exposure as the team fell behind with patch management, and suspicion that this was a root cause of the outages, Borgeteien decided to automate the process. Within a week, Digitale Gardermoen reintroduced stability, eliminating the fire fighting and 135 hours of overtime by working with Shavlik NetChk Protect. They have gained the visibility to diagnose issues as they occur and set priorities for the management of updates in their increasingly complex environment.

Establishing Control

Digitale Gardermoen's software and solutions portfolio covers infrastructure, network services, IP telephony, email, archiving and hosted applications for financial management, health services, SQL databases and more.

With one day for installation and two half-day training sessions from a Shavlik distribution partner, the company was able to establish a system for patching its entire portfolio that requires only two people and 28 man hours a month, all within the working week. Updates are scheduled for deployment by one person, who has been allocated the responsibility for patching. Ensuring a resilient process and separation of duties, another member of the team has been designated to perform weekly scans and verify the updates, rescheduling any that have been missed, or not downloaded successfully. The rest of the team is able to focus on their core responsibilities rather than trouble shooting, while those that had provided extra support in overtime got their weekends back.

The solution allows the servers to be classed and managed by network segment: a client network, internal network, administration network, and a secure network sitting within a defined secure zone, where particularly sensitive operations are housed. To accommodate an extra layer of protection for the latter group, Digitale Gardermoen was able to deploy NetChk Protect to operate from two servers, one dedicated to the secure network, and the other to manage the rest, yet be controlled from a single management dashboard. A set of pre-patch and post-scan policies are defined for each

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network segment or group, along with a set of exceptions defining what is to be handled manually – typically, primary domain controllers and mail servers, DNS, DHCP, and backup servers. Further, NetChk Protect works through VMware Virtual Center to manage the patching of virtual servers, and base images, including those that are offline. With policies defined, new servers can be automatically added to the relevant group. The solution downloads the latest updates from Shavlik covering all Microsoft patches as well as those released by a comprehensive list of other vendors, such as Adobe; and it includes a custom patch editor to allow administrators to code and distribute updates for software not covered by Shavlik, including proprietary software.



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Why Shavlik

After researching several other market leading offerings, Shavlik NetChk Protect was selected as the only option available that was “easy, targeted and quick to deploy, and therefore able to give us a quick return on investment,” explains Borgeteien.

“I was working with a limited budget and pressure to act quickly. The leading big brand solutions presented me with an expensive deployment project that would have taken months. They offered a lot of functionality but not the option to target what I needed.”

“I have always believed that if you can’t implement a piece of software within two weeks then it just isn’t worth having. With Shavlik, I had no problem selling the value to the management team.”

Shavlik was also the only solution with the ability to patch all virtual images whether offline or online. The company can now confidently build an offline stock of base virtual images representing services typically demanded by its customers, which boosts its ability to offer a quick and competitive service for new business.

Giant Leap Forward

Shavlik NetChk Protect has allowed Digitale Gardermoen to take a giant leap forward in the management of its data centre. Availability levels across all systems have increased and the daily, all-too-often severe incidents, are reduced to one or two incidents per month, most of them minor, easy to pinpoint and easy to remediate.

“We no longer have those black holes,” says Borgeteien. “We have the information at our fingertips to know the patch status of every system. Our monthly reports allow us to set priorities. We know we are behind in some areas, but we can make a valid business decision based on our knowledge of actual risks and how to address them.”

By automating with Shavlik NetChk Protect, the company has not only significantly cut its patch management burden, but also crucially addressed the risk that threatened to undermine its very innovative service. Given this and its now established track record for cutting costs and speeding up ICT implementation for the municipal sector, Digitale Gardermoen is evolving from its origins as a captive service for the six founding municipalities to being commercially active across the country. Their experience and aggressive use of virtual technology is allowing them to compete successfully on the ability to offer near ready built-access to the secured and reliable systems for which their customers would otherwise have to wait months, or longer.