

Case Study

ContentCache™ speeds up online learning at Whitchurch High School

Background:

Whitchurch High School is the largest comprehensive school in Wales with the Lower School catering for approximately 178 pupils and the Upper School for approximately 1144 pupils.

Whitchurch High boasts state of the art ICT facilities managed by the ICT Coordinator of many years, Gary Morgan, supported by two teaching staff and two full-time technicians.

With 350 PCs on their network, 14 computer rooms and over 100 concurrent users accessing the internet at any given time, it's a demanding environment for any ICT manager. The internet connection is managed by Cardiff County Council, and consists currently of a 2 Mb/s feed. In April 2004 they will be sharing a 100 Mb/s feed into a local library with 10 Mb/s going into the Lower School, and a 100 Mb/s connection between the Lower and Upper School.



The school subscribes to "Learn Premium" from the Guardian Newspaper, and are planning to use Digital Curriculum from the BBC, a purpose for which the ContentCache is well suited, and one of the main reasons for engaging in the trial.

Avantis caching and content delivery solutions are designed to accelerate and enhance access to web content and e-learning resources and enable the effective delivery, sharing and management of content within schools and local education authorities.

Optimised for high performance and high reliability, Avantis web caching appliances and content delivery management software have been developed specifically to cope with the rigorous demands of the education sector.

ContentCache™, powered by Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server, is a new smart web caching appliance available in Primary School, Secondary School and College editions.

First hand account:

Gary Morgan, ICT Co-ordinator of Whitchurch High School, was approached by Avantis to trial the new ContentCache web caching server to give the school an idea of the potential their broadband connection had to offer.

Gary is well aware of the issues and problems of sharing a broadband connection throughout a school: **"...if it is too slow downloading content from a particular website, the students lose interest in what they are doing."** Making sure all users have a satisfactory broadband and e-learning experience is a major part of Gary's role and anything that can aid that is very welcome. However most available solutions in this field have the downside of being difficult to use or not very focussed on the needs of the educational sector.

Avantis delivered the ContentCache to Whitchurch High School with easy to use instructions for the set-up of the server. Gary managed to get everything working very quickly, in fact he was shocked at how easy it was to install. Getting to grips with how it worked was a breeze as well, with the administrative functions being

very straightforward to use. Gary was very keen to let teachers manage their own content and create their own menus with the Content Planner, which they found to be simple to use, **“giving them the independence and confidence to plan lessons themselves...allowing them to integrate ICT into everyday teaching more successfully.”**

Initially Gary did not actually tell staff or students that they had installed a new appliance to accelerate internet access, but users noticed immediately that there was a significant improvement in the speed of access. In fact users approached him with unprompted comments and questions such as **“Why is the internet so fast?”** Gary himself was **“incredibly impressed with the speed improvement”** comparing it to **“grease lightning!”** To show how fast it was, he downloaded a 10 Mb file over the school’s existing connection, and it took over 10 minutes. Accessing it from a workstation that was connected via the ContentCache and it was **“instantaneous...a fantastic improvement.”**



After installation, the true test came when users began accessing media-rich sites. Sue Carter, Head of Languages at Whitchurch High School, had 500 primary school pupils visit the school over a period of 3 days to have an introduction to secondary school life. As part of this 160 computers were used to access the internet, over and above the usual level of traffic from everyday pupil web access. During this time of intensive usage, speed of web access was described as **“a tremendous improvement.”**

Conclusion:

Gary Morgan had nothing but praise for the ContentCache server, especially given that access to on-line resources will be an increasingly prominent issue in education especially with the forthcoming Curriculum Online.

Gary believed the ContentCache server had many benefits to offer schools, among them:

- ♦ Startlingly faster web access, providing an enriched online learning experience
- ♦ **“Shockingly”** easy to implement, use and manage for all users
- ♦ Helps lesson planning for teachers as web pages can be selected and pre-cached ahead of lessons
- ♦ Keeps track of school and student internet usage, with easy to use reports

Overall, Gary and Whitchurch High School have been pleased with their experience with the ContentCache, and have no doubts about it’s ability to cope with the demands of the school. Gary finished by saying **“with ContentCache...the students get more work done being a huge benefit to the students and staff alike.”**

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