Meraki

Large Canadian Public School District

- 26,000 iPads and 900 iPhones managed using Meraki Systems Manager
- Integration with Apple's Volume Purchasing Program enables rapid deployment
- Messaging feature used to help locate devices and to alert owners about updates

With thousands of iPads and iPhones deployed to 200,000 students, teachers, and admins, a large Canadian school board is a firm believer in the power of technology to transform learning.

Matthew Smith*, one of the school board's Systems Analysts, and his team take care of large, district-wide projects and support a distributed team of PC, LAN, and field technicians.

About two years ago, Smith became painfully aware of the need for a robust enterprise mobility management (EMM) system to manage all of the school district's iOS devices. The district deploys over 26,000 iPads and 900 iPhones across 270 school sites, a massive number of devices by any stretch of the imagination. Though the school board had been using the devices to enhance lessons in the classroom for over four years, it had yet to adopt and implement an EMM solution, instead leaving it up to individual schools and administrators to manage their own fleet of devices. "It was sort of the Wild West out there," Smith admits. "Field technicians at each school were using MacBooks as configuration stations, but so many things could go wrong — if a MacBook got stolen, all configurations would be lost."

The school district's IT team knew implementing an EMM solution was crucial given the wide variety of use cases for the iOS devices district-wide. Teachers regularly use the devices to present lessons — some of the schools use 150 different apps for learning — and students use the devices' cameras and video editing capabilities to create video projects. Since the devices are shared (students don't have their own iPads and they rarely take the tablets home), it's important that they always have the right sets of apps and profiles installed. "The kids grab the iPads off of a cart wheeled into the classroom, and that's their lesson for the day," Smith says.

The school board conducted an extensive RFP process, inviting multiple vendors to bid for the opportunity to deploy an EMM solution spread across the entire school district. After running a pilot with several vendors and testing out different features and functionalities across different groups of schools, the board chose to adopt Cisco Meraki's EMM solution, Systems Manager.

As soon as Systems Manager was decided upon, Smith and his team went to work on enrolling all of the district's iOS devices. Despite the school district's decentralized structure — each school has its own

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* Name changed to protect anonymity

network and often its own set of apps, since the district is comprised of elementary, middle, and high schools — Smith found this process easy. The team used network tagging, a feature of Systems Manager, to tag each network with keywords (e.g., "elementary" or "special education"), making it simple to enroll devices in bulk and provision them appropriately.

For the school board, the biggest benefit of Meraki Systems Manager is the ability to quickly deploy apps across different devices. The district uses Apple's Volume Purchasing Program (VPP) to download free and paid apps and then uses Systems Manager to silently install those apps on many devices all at once.

Smith and his team also use Systems Manager to provision device profiles, push Wi-Fi settings, and manage inventory. Smith says Systems Manager makes it simple to configure Wi-Fi on new devices, traditionally a slow and manual process. "I have a test network with profiles on it, and when a new school comes into play or a new network needs to be created, I'll create the network and use a clone of the profile to copy the Wi-Fi profile," Smith says.

When the unexpected occurs — and things can certainly get unpredictable with so many devices deployed in so many places — Systems Manager helps the school district keep everything in order. If an iPad is lost or stolen, Smith can remotely lock it and push a message to the device while working in conjunction with local police to locate the iPad. Moreover, some iPads belonging to certain departments (e.g., special education) need to be specially provisioned. Systems Manager lets Smith do this in just a few clicks.

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>
> -- Matthew Smith*, System Analyst

Meraki Systems Manager has also helped the school board save money by repurposing old devices. The district issues iPhones to employees at administrator level and above so they can check their email and be productive even when they're on the go. When the district decided to purchase iPhone 7 devices for employees, it took the old iPhone 5 devices and configured them with Cisco Jabber using Systems Manager. These older iPhones were then handed to custodial staff, replacing an even older set of pagers. The custodians could then respond to service requests much faster by using instant messenger.

From a security standpoint, Smith has found Systems Manager extremely useful for keeping thousands of iPads and iPhones up-to-date and secured with the latest security patches. "We found that people often cancel updates when they come out of nowhere," Smith says. With Systems Manager, the school district uses the messaging feature to automatically push a notification to every device when an update is available, encouraging the user to apply the update. These notifications repeat a couple of times before a final warning, after which the update is automatically applied. "The messaging function allows us to communicate better with every user," Smith explains. "It ensures that we keep devices protected from the latest threats, while we avoid angering busy administrators by updating their devices without advanced warning."

As the school district deploys even more iOS devices in classrooms and schools in the future, Meraki Systems Manager will continue to simplify the provisioning and management process for the district. Smith is excited for that future. "We open up 2-3 schools a year, so as we order hundreds of new devices, Systems Manager makes it simple to get them all set up and ready to go," Smith says. "It's probably one of our most-used systems because it does exactly what we need it to do."

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