

Highlands County
Clerk of Courts



Highlands County, Florida Enhances Active Directory and File System Services with DSRAZOR and CPTRAX

DSRAZOR and CPTRAX Offers County New Reporting, Tracking, and Documentation Capabilities

Background:

The IT department at Highlands County, Florida services and reports to the Clerk of Courts. It also supports the Board of County Commissioners and the financial databases for all constitutional officers. The office of the Clerk is a complex organization that performs a wide range of record keeping, information management, and financial management tasks in the Judicial System and the County Government. The Clerk is charged with 926 administrative responsibilities, many of them requiring IT support.

After completing the migration to Windows Active Directory and Windows File System Servers, the IT staff found it difficult to view, manage, audit, and report data on the various directory and file system objects, such as users, computers, volumes, and groups. After careful review of various third party vendors, they chose Visual Click's CPTRAX and DSRAZOR for Windows AD and NTFS Security Administration. The goal was to improve documentation, security, and auditing capabilities of directory and file system services.

Challenge: Migration does not Provide Needed Audit Trail

The IT department was in the middle of a Novell network project when it realized the network was causing problems with interoperability between county agencies. The County had migrated to Microsoft Windows Active Directory in order to provide a better audit trail. The current administration hoped that the migration to Active Directory would give it the ability to identify what information was going on the network within certain files, what kind of directory security was in place, and who was making changes to the files. What if found, however, was that the information was there, but Active Directory did not provide an easy way to view which groups had what rights to what directories.

The IT department wanted to document all activity for auditing and security purposes and Visual Click Software offered the perfect combination of solutions and services for Windows in its CPTRAX and DSRAZOR products.

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CPTRAX

for Windows

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“The Visual Click tools enhance Windows and give us more control over our data.”

Action: Investing in CPTRAX and DSRAZOR for Windows

When the county IT department was considering solutions, its server administrator suggested Visual Click because she had used one of its products in the past. After seeing demos on Visual Click CPTRAX and DSRAZOR for Windows, the department was convinced it would give them the auditing and security functionality it desired.

The two most critical projects were around reporting, tracking, and documentation. The first step was to document all of the security groups that had access to certain files. The second step was to develop an audit trail to record a file history. Visual Click’s CPTRAX and DSRAZOR could help the department do both.

“The ease of use, functionality, and value was why we chose CPTRAX and DSRAZOR,” says Tony Qualls, chief technology officer at Highlands County, Florida. “Other products on the market accomplished similar tasks, but few were as straightforward. Visual Click offered the best service and is dedicated to helping us not only with the implementation and design, but with ongoing support, maintenance, and future upgrades.”

CPTRAX and DSRAZOR give customers hundreds of customizable applications (applets) from which to choose that fit specific business needs to help manage and leverage the information stored in Active Directory. The flexibility of the products allows the County to use its native Microsoft tool, but leverage Visual Click applets, or a combination of them, to build an executable to manage and create accounts. Visual Click provides expert support services to help the administrator customize the applets, or even build them for her within minutes if she is short on time. “Active Directory has a native tool that tracks and audits, but it requires significant time and effort and is rigid in its design,” says Qualls. “The Visual Click tools enhance Windows and give us more control over our data.”

DSRAZOR is an administration tool designed to help users get the most out of Active Directory without any scripting or advanced programming skills. The IT department is utilizing several DSRAZOR Assess Active Directory/NTFS Security applets such as “Accounts Never Logged In.” This applet gives them visibility into whether the created accounts are actually being used.

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“Accounts Unused for 30 Days” gives the department an additional level of security to verify all accounts from people who have left the organization are deactivated. “ACL Documentation per File System Share” provides instant data about what groups have access rights to what shared folders. This report eliminates the need for the administrator to look into each group. Instead, they can go to the end file share and quickly see who has access, ensuring no one has inherited rights or is making changes without authorization.

A Query and Search Active Directory applet used by the county is “Last Logon Data and Time for Computer Accounts” which locates computers that haven’t been turned on and are therefore not receiving critical security patches. Further, many of these unused systems can be redeployed elsewhere.

DSRAZOR applets also give the department troubleshooting tools with the Examine Servers/Disks applets, such as the “Directory/File Ownership.” This enables the administrator to look at an actual file and verify who can see it and if they in fact should. Instead of spending valuable time with the Microsoft tool drilling down into the file, then the group, this applet provides a report within seconds.

CPTRAX for Windows offers similar features as DSRAZOR, but focuses on compliance and control for auditing and restricting file system access to enterprise data. The county is currently using many of the Track File System Activity applets to give them an audit trail of who created, deleted, or renamed a file and which user permissions were changed, added, or deleted. When the IT department receives public records requests, it can quickly determine if and when the file was changed and by whom.

Results: Automated Audit Trail

With all of the functionality the department is receiving from CPTRAX and DSRAZOR, it has plans for utilizing more in the future. “We would like to take advantage of some of the helpdesk capabilities,” says Qualls. “The user self-update feature will give us the latest information and enable people to make simple changes to their accounts without engaging IT. Along the same lines is the ‘user password intruder lockout.’ The department manager could reset passwords if a user is locked out instead of burdening IT with such basic tasks.”

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Qualls said the applet for finding files unused for the past 365 days would be beneficial because it would help them ensure archived files are being accessed and if not, allow them to remove them from the SAN to save space. “The possibilities are nearly endless,” he says. “CPTRAX and DSRAZOR give us exactly what we need now and at the same time, give us a host of options for future enhancements.”

Since implementing CPTRAX and DSRAZOR, the server administrator at Highlands County is saving several hours per week in maintaining and creating accounts in Active Directory. But Qualls says the biggest advantage has been with the documentation capabilities. “Every IT department knows they need to document, but often don’t have the time required by native tools,” he says. “CPTRAX and DSRAZOR for Windows help document network configurations. For government agencies, it is a great tool to provide audit and security trails on changes to files in your network.”

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About Visual Click Software, Inc

Envisioned in 1996 and incorporated in 1999, Visual Click is the leader and pioneer in visually customizable computer network security access management and reporting applications.

Network Security Access Management: Our patented Visual Designer Technology allows for customer-specific applications to be developed in minutes rather than days, weeks or months. This powerful technology creates a new paradigm in network security access management. Previous technology either required use of overly large and complex 'consoles' that performed slowly and required product-specific training or required customized programming.

Our technology allows customers to create exactly what they need to control their network security access management without burdening the Administrator or requiring custom computer programming costs.

Network Security Reporting: Our patented Visual Designer Technology allows for customer-defined reports to be developed in minutes with very little training. This powerful technology allows the Network Administrator to focus on the important matters of securing a network. With minor customizations, each Network Security Report can simultaneously be used for Network Security Access Management. Each Network Security Report can also be used to change the Network Security issues it uncovers. This important technology solves two problems at the same time, namely, reporting about Network Security non-compliance and enforcing corporate Network Security policy.

Customer Benefits: Exceeding customer expectations is our number one goal. We know time is a resource that most IT professionals have in short supply. For this reason, our software is designed to reduce errors and minimize training costs, thereby freeing up valuable time to focus on more mission-critical tasks. From simplifying user management and maintaining regulatory compliance, to preparing for migration and delegating helpdesk duties, our software empowers our customers by saving them time and money associated with managing their networked environments.

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