

PE TECHNIKON UPGRADES

Eastern Cape based PE Technikon has upgraded its NetSupport School system to Version 7.5 and extended it beyond the information technology (IT) faculty at its George Campus to include the marketing, sport and tourism faculties.

PE Technikon (a university of technology) is situated in Port Elizabeth and offers diplomas and degrees up to doctorate level, in a wide range of career-related disciplines. The institution boasts eight faculties on five campuses – three in Port Elizabeth and two in George.

Based at the Centre for Business and information technology studies in George, IT Lecturer, JC Nortjé, says that the institution initially sought a way in which to minimise the hassle of class presentations.

"Class presentations were a considerable burden on the lecturers of the IT department. Every time we wanted to give a presentation to the class – which was often – we would have to requisition laptops, overhead projectors and screens; set them up and then take them down again after the lecture. Additionally, there were always a few students who weren't able to see the presentation properly," he explains.

In 2002, the department procured NetSupport School Version 6 for use in its IT department. The software made an immediate impact on the department, enabling it to make use of the workstations within the classrooms to distribute files, walk through presentations and slide shows as well as demonstrate software to students in the class. Since the initial deployment the institution has upgraded to Version 7.5 and Nortjé says that Net Support School has become an invaluable aid in communication lessons to students effectively.

A single box solution. NetSupport School offers a comprehensive range of features including the ability to remote control student workstations, as well as view up to 16 student screens on the tutor machine simultaneously. Nortjé has specific praise for the Remote Control and Application Control functions. Through these features he is able to monitor, control and restrict application usage on student workstations.

The Remote Control Function enables tutors to watch, share or control the screen, keyboard and mouse of any student workstation irrespective of differences in colour depth, resolution, network protocol or operating system at either end. Used together with the Monitor Mode feature, Tutors are able to see and control up to 16 workstations in the thumbnail view.

In turn, the Application and Web Control Modules enable teachers to control and restrict the application and web usage of the students through easy identification of both active and minimised applications and pages. Using the drag and drop feature teachers are quickly and effectively able to limit or open access by adding those icons to the approved or restricted list. Lecturers can also open specific applications and Web pages on all or selected student workstations, reducing time and increasing effectiveness.

"During general classes we use the Remote Control to monitor activity on student workstations. If student focus is being distracted by games or

internet surfing, we are able to restrict access to those applications through the Application Control function. This is particularly useful during tests and exams too. Before students enter, we restrict all applications other than those needed for the exam so that we can monitor what is happening on each workstation." Nortjé explains.

Nortjé uses the system to aid him in his role as an online lecturer for the international Cisco Academy. "The file transfer and file distribution aspects have made it far easier for me to transfer and distribute files both online and in the classroom – I literally just drag and drop and the files become available almost immediately."

The same features have enabled the technikon to distribute test files to specific folders on all workstations, which are collected afterwards into a collection folder with a subfolder for each student with his or her name as the folder. In the past, Lecturers had to create shared folders on network drives, which had resulted in many errors.

Concluding, Nortjé says that the system's greatest feature has been its stability, "The features using the system have become used to relying on NetSupport School because it is always there and always performing. Instead of being distracted by concerns over whether we will have the tools necessary to conduct the class, we now focus completely on the students and their needs."