Thoughts on a Reduced Basic Image for the ThinkPad

The evolution of the ThinkPad has seen a steady increase of the power of the Laptop. It has also seen a rise in the number of preinstalled applications found in the Standard Load.

This increase in the footprint of the Standard Load has spawned several misconceptions, such as a larger load makes the system boot slower. Another myth is a larger load makes reloading a system all that much slower. Both of these myths are false, however it does bring up the much needed discussion as to WHY the image is as large as it is.

The basic reason for the size of the load is utility. We have found over the years that by pre-installing software we can guarantee that everyone receiving the system is on a level playing field in basic capability. Pre-installation allows faculty to assign assignments on any given day of class without the need to have students download, install and configure software. It also allows the students to know that they can move rapidly from classroom to homework without the need to download an application or go to the Help Desk for an installation. Remote installation also becomes a larger concern if reliable and relatively fast network connectivity is not available.

Despite the obvious benefits of software pre-installation, there are many areas for improvement. I have examined the software in the standard load and identified three key types of software worth investigating. These areas are Redundant Software, Underused Software and Freeware. In each section I will list the applications that I feel warrant further examination for continued inclusion on the Standard Load.

**Redundant Software:**
Adobe Elements
PaintShop Pro
Windows PowerShell

**Underused Software:**
Adobe Dreamweaver
Office 2003 Language User Interface Pack
  Arabic
  Chinese (Simplified and Traditional)
  French
  German
  Greek
  Hebrew
  Italian
  Japanese
  Russian
  Spanish
Microsoft Interactive Training
Microsoft Virtual PC
Microsoft Producer for Powerpoint 2003
Microsoft Bookshelf Basics
Microsoft Office Info Path
PASCO Scientific – DataStudio Executable
PASCO Scientific – DataStudio PASPortal
GhostScript
GSView
Virtual Astronomy Lab
JSTOR
JPRINT
SatSat
SCLOCK
SkyGlobe
WinDirStat
VMD

Freeware:
Apple QuickTime
Chimera
DivX
FolderShare
RealNetworks Player
TechSmith Corporation Camtasia Player
Issues: Alternative procurement for email and calendaring services

Why Increase the quality of services delivered to students and alumni. Possibly reduce costs associated with managing, maintaining, and/or upgrading in-house services; scalability issues outsourced, no worries. We can change our mind about these decisions with reduced consequences associated with maintaining or upgrading in-house infrastructure (no significant money investment). New services are cutting-edge Web 2.0 - support "mashup technology"/online integration via API, and user configuration.

Background: Students currently have POP3 email and a very unpopular web-mail service, no calendaring, 20MB of quota, 25MB for a home page and web space, attachment limits of 5MB. Require on-campus access or VPN to send mail. Alumni - access to a forwarding account only, to an incoming and outgoing email account. Currently, students are often redirected their email to external services such as Yahoo, Hotmail, Google, and others.

Issues associated with keeping these services in-house:
1. Must upgrade current infrastructure (mixed mode POP3 UNIX, MIS Exchange, Oracle e-mail database, medium cost?)
2. An entirely new system requires new support structure/training. High cost?

Google Apps for Education and Microsoft Live Hotmail @ edu

What it is: Google Apps for Education is an online suite of applications that provides email, calendaring, web pages, document creation, presentations, and spreadsheet processing, document collaboration, voice and text chat. Windows Live Hotmail is a competing service with similar online email functionality without web-delivered applications. Both services will take on the entire WFU user community with @wu.edu email addresses.

Google provides 24/7 support. 1 GB quota for mail, AJAX and traditional webmail, ability to integrate multiple e-mail accounts into one POP3, enterprise grade calendaring, home page, online applications for spreadsheets, documents, and presentations. Voice/Text chat. Mobile phone integration. Virtually all Google services integrate using Google Gadgets.

Live provides 24/7 support. 5 GB quota, AJAX and "classic" webmail. Very attractive interfaces similar to Outlook; instant messenger, mobile phone integration; blogging and pages. Lacks POP3 for new, non-traditional e-mail accounts (no sync) plugins for Thunderbird do exist. Lacks mail redirection capability. Both Windows (non-Browser) client.

Pros: Both are "free" both will not hard-line and allow branding/using WFU logo for students, alumni (get email). Google and MS both reserve the right to advertise to users.

Cons: As with any external contract, we don't control contractor's corporate policy. Questions about FIRE Next-generation and corporate email discovery and retention requirements (critical software) still open. Requires web connection to view/send email (Google means will change this). May not be very good (though this is a benefit). Requires internet connection to be "up" (single point of failure). Google and MS both reserve the right to advertise to users.

Timeframe: contractor terms time frame.


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