



CUSTOMER STORY

Merced College

VDI pilot with IGEL thin clients and converted desktops brings easy management, controlled costs to California community college



Merced College

Merced College is a community college located in Merced, California, approximately 100 miles south of the state capital of Sacramento. Celebrating its 50-year anniversary, Merced College boasts accredited programs in seven academic areas. Merced's seven-person IT staff serves the growing school's more than 14,000 students, 500 faculty and professors and 200 staff at multiple campuses.

As a public college, Merced College relies heavily on often unreliable state funding. The college, which has experienced serious budget cuts over the past three years, is constantly trying to do more with less while still providing students and employees with the resources and training they need. Merced's IT department needed an easier way to manage thousands of desktops and reduce hardware costs, and began the move to a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI).

Extending the Life of PCs with IGEL's UDC Software

"We decided to make the move to desktop virtualization and needed a good thin client to pilot in the computer labs," says Arlis Botner, Network Manager at Merced College. "We did our research, looking at multiple thin client vendors, and decided that IGEL Technology was the best fit."

One of the pilot areas for the VDI project was a student computer lab. Multiple classes utilize the lab every day, and students need dependable access to training applications, research databases, and other resources. Instead of replacing aging HP computers with more desktops, Merced converted them into thin clients with IGEL's Universal Desktop Converter (UDC) software. The college deployed VMware View to provide logged-in students with instant access to a generic virtual desktop running Windows XP with Microsoft Office and third-party software.

Using IGEL's UDC software, Merced was able to extend the life of student lab desktops. The UDC allows organizations to migrate existing PCs or old thin clients into a fully manageable IGEL thin client-like device. The software is perfect for piloting thin client technology and provides more control over the procurement costs of desktop hardware.

THE CUSTOMER

- ▶ Merced College located in Merced, California
- ▶ Community college serving 14,000+ students
- ▶ Established in 1962

A Seamless Transition from Traditional to Virtual Desktops

Merced tested IGEL's Universal Desktop thin client hardware in its administration staff training lab. Staff use IGEL UD5-430LX thin clients with IGEL's own Linux OS and built-in Firefox browser to access webmail, web pages, and more for basic work. Based on network credentials, authenticated staff can also click a desktop icon to launch a VMware View desktop with Windows 7 to work on bigger projects.

"We've had a really positive reception from the staff labs," says Arlis Botner. "Users are pleased with performance. It's just like being at their own computer."

The IGEL thin clients are appreciated by the IT staff as well. The IGEL UD5 is a powerful and expandable hardware platform with high-speed processor and graphics that can support demanding applications or many applications simultaneously. It supports the broadest range of connectivity to peripherals, including options for an integrated smartcard reader and anti-theft USB port.

"The IGELs are much more flexible in the staff lab than PCs," says Arlis. "We don't have to re-image PCs all the time and can just deliver whatever we want to staff members based on how they log in. Plus the USB integration and redirection is great."



IGEL's Easy Management Gets High Marks

Management of both the converted PCs and the thin clients is easy with IGEL's Universal Management Suite (UMS) software. Arlis and his team use the UMS to set up, maintain and upgrade all the IGEL thin clients from a central location. Intuitive to use, secure and scalable up to 100,000 thin clients, the IGEL UMS drastically reduces management time for IT administrators. Rolling out and maintaining desktop imaging every quarter used to take up a significant amount of time, and now Merced IT staff's workload is freed up to focus on more critical projects.

"IGEL's management was the biggest difference when we were deciding between thin client vendors," says Arlis. "It's usually so cumbersome to do uniform changes across many units, but having a central point of management and the ability to use profiles and layering profiles is really cool. We also really like the interface. IGEL gets an A++ on the management interface."

THE CHALLENGE

- ▶ Virtual desktop access for college staff
- ▶ Extend the life of student computer lab PCs
- ▶ Cost effective and easy-to-manage solution

THE SOLUTION

- ▶ IGEL Universal Desktop Converter (UDC) software to convert outdated PCs
- ▶ IGEL Universal Management Suite (UMS) to centrally manage the thin client infrastructure
- ▶ Virtual desktop solution using IGEL and VMware View

Expanding from Pilot Project to Campus-Wide

Merced College is nine months into their pilot program and is already looking to expand their usage of IGEL thin clients. Since IGELs have no moving parts such as cooling fans or hard drives, they have a higher tolerance to dust and dirt than PCs. This makes IGEL thin clients ideal for Merced's agricultural, art, and industrial tech labs where dirt, clay, and brake dust are an unavoidable part of student learning. Additionally, the college is testing IGEL UD5 thin clients as replacements for administrative staff's daily desktops devices.

"Ideally, staff could have an IGEL thin client sitting on their desk at work with dual monitors or whatever they need, and then go home and use their personal laptop to VPN into their Merced virtual desktop," explains Arlis.

While Merced College only has so much to spend on expanding its VDI program, IGEL's thin client hardware and software offers an attractive future-proof solution. The firmware embedded in every IGEL Universal Desktop thin client contains the industry's largest collection of server-based protocols for connecting to centralized applications. While Merced only uses VMware now, if they decide to change direction later, they won't need new devices. The life of Merced's IGEL UD5 devices are also guaranteed with a five-year warranty, giving Merced more protection and tighter control of IT costs.

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