



Minnesota Department of Health Gains Control of Active Directory with DSRAZOR

DSRAZOR Provides Minnesota Department of Health with Robust Tools Not Available with Most Native Tools

Background:

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is widely considered one of the premier public health agencies among state governments. The MDH IT department continues to implement technology and work processes to improve current and new IT requirements. With a recent migration from Novell to Windows Active Directory, MDH wanted an efficient yet powerful solution to help it manage its new technology environment.

Focused on gaining control of assets and user groups within Active Directory, the MDH IT department realized the native tool in Active Directory would not provide the needed flexibility or ease of use the organization required. It found Visual Click Software's DSRAZOR for Windows and the Zero Privilege Help Desk Delegation agent met the department's criteria by offering automation and delegation of Active Directory/NTFS management and reporting tasks across the organization.

Challenge: Managing Active Directory and Delegating Tasks

Last year MDH completed its migration from Novell to Windows and faced common post-migration challenges, both technical and organizational. "We needed a set of tools to better manage and audit Active Directory," says Cody Bodin, network administrator in the Information Systems and Technology Division within MDH. "We found the native Active Directory tool was limited in the kind of information we could gather and the functions we needed, such as auditing Active Directory and File System security settings, managing the Active Directory change process, and delegating tasks to our help desk staff."

Further, MDH wanted a solution that allowed delegating Active Directory management tasks to lower-cost resources while preserving their internal security policy. "With native tools, if someone needs to manage Active Directory Users and Groups, they need elevated rights to the Directory," explains Bodin. "While that is acceptable in some cases, our security policy prevents us from elevating user privileges in most cases. We don't always want people to have rights to anything in Active Directory. We also didn't want our senior staff members performing administrative tasks that pull them away from more important infrastructure projects."

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Action: Investing in DSRAZOR for Windows

After researching a few vendors, MDH was impressed with the products from Visual Click Software. DSRAZOR for Windows and the Zero Privilege Help Desk Delegation Agent provides the needed functionality and customizability to meet their requirements. DSRAZOR is a three-tiered application architecture that includes a Visual Designer, Management Console, and more than 100 pre-built applets for managing and reporting AD/NTFS. “We liked the flexibility that DSRAZOR offered,” says Bodin. “We could immediately implement one of the prebuilt applets, or use the Visual Designer to customize the applet, or delegate the applet as a stand-alone executable. It gives us the ability to delegate simple tasks to users without making them an administrative equivalent. And we can do it without scripting or programming skills.”

There are hundreds of ready-to-use ADSI, LDAP and Windows services that can be applied to create a custom interface. MDH currently utilizes a dozen of them and had modified at least 20 to build applications in the Designer Tool that precisely fits its requirements.

All of the functionality of DSRAZOR includes unlimited support from Visual Click. Training, technical support, upgrades, and customization of reports are all part of the maintenance agreement offered by Visual Click. In fact, Bodin leveraged the knowledge of Visual Click to teach him and his team how to develop many of their first custom applets. Now Bodin and his team can create their own derivatives of the prebuilt applets in a matter of minutes, saving hours, if not days, of scripting that was previously required.

Results: Streamlining Active Directory

The applets, both prebuilt and modified, have helped MDH streamline its environment since its Novell migration to Active Directory. It has gained control over its assets and user groups while eliminating costs for machines that have been decommissioned.

“The most valuable prebuilt applets for us have allowed us to quickly view the accounts that have never logged in to Active Directory and those unused for a specific amount of days,” explains Bodin. “Although some of these capabilities are available in Active Directory, they are not as robust and are quite complicated and time consuming.”

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The Zero Privilege Helpdesk Delegation Agent allows MDH to delegate routine administrative tasks in Active Directory, such as password resets, to lower-cost employees, so that more senior IT staff can focus on business-critical initiatives. “With DSRAZOR, we can build an application with a specific task and use the Zero Privilege utility so the end user doesn’t require any rights to do the task,” says Bodin. “The task is completed and logged for tracking purposes. If we need to give the application to someone else, even outside of the IT department, we can do so without changing Active Directory. It keeps Active Directory much cleaner from a security perspective.”

Developers in the IT department are appreciative of their new access rights, eliminating the need to submit a work ticket before they can gain access to Active Directory. They are more productive and responsive to requests.

Bodin says the time savings has been one of the most measurable benefits of DSRAZOR. “With the native tool, you can spend hours scripting a complex query to run against Active Directory. With DSRAZOR, I can get my answers in three clicks. We are more efficient and have greater visibility into our technology platform.”

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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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