

Minnesota School District Finds the Perfect “Classroom Monitor”



Park Rapids Area School District

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Industry: Education
Location: Park Rapids, Minnesota

The Park Rapids Area School District has a PC network of seven servers and approximately 850 computer workstations running across elementary, middle, and high school campuses. Nearly 550 of the workstations are Windows-based PCs, and around 300 are Macintosh.

For more information about the Park Rapids Area School District, please visit: parkrapids.k12.mn.us.

The Park Rapids Area School District was challenged to comply with the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) because “kids try to get away with what they can.”

The Challenge

In addition to ensuring children are unable to use a public school computer to access Internet web sites dedicated to what are often described as the “sinful six” – pornography, gambling, illegal activities, hate, tasteless materials, and violence – schools also must be vigilant in tracking potential negative situations brought about by threatening emails, offensive chats, copyright liabilities, and a host of other PC and Internet-related activities.

“Our Internet Acceptable Use Policy was a challenge to enforce,” said Jeff Hunt, Director of Information and Technology.

“Kids are kids,” added Technical Support Engineer Todd Kumpula. “They try to get away with what they can.”

Search for a Solution

“Given the requirements of CIPA and the legal implications of what can go on in a school environment in this day and age, you’ve got to protect yourself,” emphasized Hunt. “You need an Internet monitoring tool.”

The school district’s first attempt at implementing a monitoring solution involved trying Novell’s Border Manager, but Hunt felt that product “left a lot to be desired.”

“It didn’t track by workstation or user,” said Hunt. “And it really was more of a filter than a monitor.”

Given the curious and persistent nature of students, filtering alone was not about to keep students in line. For example, blocking a web site to one online game simply led students to search for another site with another game ... setting up a seemingly endless contest of hide-and-seek.

Believing the answer was certainly somewhere on the Internet, Kumpula used a popular search engine, simply entering the term “Internet monitoring”. Up popped SpectorSoft, and the subsequent path of due diligence led to purchasing Spector 360 ... networkable activity monitoring software capable of providing the Park Rapids Area School District with a complete record of student and employee PC and Internet use.

“We got a great response from the SpectorSoft team. We needed a solution, came across it, tested it, bought it and we’ve really had just a positive experience.”

It’s made a huge difference ... well worth the investment.”

Jeff Hunt
Park Rapids Area School District
Park Rapids, Minnesota

“At first I thought price would be an issue,” said Hunt. Working closely with the SpectorSoft sales and development team, however, Hunt found affordable, multi-license pricing and at the same time discovered one of the nuances that make SpectorSoft a positive anomaly in the world of software: “live” people paying real attention to the needs of customers. In fact, SpectorSoft provides both telephone and email support 7 days a week, 364 days a year. The company is closed on Christmas day.

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Discoveries

Most users find SpectorSoft monitoring technology to be a remarkably effective deterrent, and the Park Rapids Area School District is no different. The scenario goes something like this: using the software’s unrivaled ability to actively record, archive, review, and provide visual evidence of inappropriate PC activity, a student or employee is confronted. Word then spreads like wildfire, and the end result is productivity increases and the incidence of malicious actions drops to near zero.

For example:

The computer labs seat 30 students and nearly half were responsible for inappropriate behavior at any previous checkpoint in time, but since the introduction of Spector 360, it’s down to one or two.

“The incidents are few and far between now,” said Kumpula. “And that alone saves us work. We don’t have to ‘clean’ the machines as often as before.”

Hunt described a web site at which one can insert a person’s name and it will create an image of that person “destroyed”. At one time, the site attracted quite a few Park Rapids Area students, but once a student tried it with Spector 360 in place, the outcome of the prank was decidedly different.

“In this case, the Principal called us to get the information, and with a Spector 360 snapshot we did. The guilty student was caught,” said Hunt. “We use the snapshots a lot. Also the keystroke recording capability. The broadness of the program is impressive. Snapshots, keystrokes, email monitoring ... prior to Spector 360 we didn’t have any of these.”

Peer-to-peer file sharing is another legally sensitive area of considerable concern to any environment with a youthful population. Before Spector 360 came along, many such frowned-upon activities went unnoticed and unchecked. However, it didn’t take long for Spector 360 to put an end to a practice over which the music industry will gladly take anyone -- including a school system -- to court.

“We found a folder with 60-80 songs in it on one of our file servers ... way down deep,” said Kumpula. “We wouldn’t have found the songs without Spector 360.”

Awareness

Hunt described in detail exactly what Spector 360 is capable of doing, and doing it so well that students now call Kumpula the “tech Nazi”. A typical scenario during a school day in the life of Hunt and Kumpula:

- » A telephone call is received from a teacher regarding an alleged PC-based student infraction.
- » Facilitated by Spector 360 recordings, the infraction is investigated by viewing the data at ANY PC on the school network.
- » Visual evidence of the infraction is obtained and printed out.
- » The evidence is shared with the teacher and the Principal.
- » The student is sent to the Principal’s office to address the evidence, and
- » A telephone call is received from the Principal to disable the student account.

“The first time a student was confronted with a Spector 360 snapshot, the word was out within 1-2 days,” said Kumpula. “There are still those students who don’t care, but for the most part, the student body is under control. We’ve put the fear of God in them.”

Even teachers and administration personnel have dropped non-business use of school PCs to the barest of minimums.

“We were seeing sexual sites visited,” said Hunt. “But since the introduction of Spector 360, we rarely see anything like that.”

Spector 360: The Software of Choice

“All kinds of things were going on with the computers before we began using Spector 360 monitoring software,” said Kumpula. “But not anymore.”

According to Hunt and Kumpula, the advent of Spector 360 has “really locked down” the computer environment at the school district, increased classroom productivity many-fold, and helped the district comply with the tenets of CIPA.

Under CIPA, which was signed into law in December 2001, no school or its library may receive discounts on internet technology products unless it certifies it is enforcing an Internet Safety Policy by including the use of filtering or blocking technology. CIPA decrees this Internet Safety Policy must protect against access, through computers with Internet connections, to visual depictions that are obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors.

Thanks in large part to Spector 360, part of a two-pronged safeguard, the Park Rapids Area School District receives its discount. The school district’s first line of defense in CIPA compliance is a solid firewall.

“The firewall does content filtering and Spector 360 does the monitoring,” said Hunt. The combination has proved to be a dynamic duo. Prior to implementing Spector 360 software, Hunt said teachers felt compelled to look over the shoulders of students in an attempt to control PC activity.

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It’s our invisible set of eyes. I’m still amazed at what Spector 360 can do.”

Todd Kumpula
Park Rapids Area School District
Park Rapids, Minnesota

About Spector 360®

Spector 360 enables you to monitor employee PC and Internet use, analyze trends and patterns, search for specific details, investigate when something seems amiss, and report your findings all from the convenience of your desktop. Spector 360 is a highly scalable, centrally-managed, employee monitoring solution that is easy to deploy and manage, even company-wide.

Features at a Glance

- Monitor all employee PC and Internet activity with high-level charts, graphs and tables
- View detailed activity of individual employees with point-and-click drill down
- Automated reporting
- Includes context-based web filtering
- Multiple levels of security prevent tampering or disabling
- Configure, install and manage over existing network



Spector 360
June 17, 2008

"Top-notch reporting and monitoring"

"Highly configurable and scalable"

"Well-designed client server architecture"

-PC Magazine

"Teachers praise our ability to monitor," said Hunt. "Classroom productivity has absolutely increased using Spector 360. Teachers now feel like they can talk TO the students, as opposed to having to stand BEHIND them. Spector 360 is one of the best software buys we've made since I've been here. Probably the best."

Said Kumpula: "It's our invisible set of eyes. I'm still amazed at what Spector 360 can do."

Perhaps the greatest benefit of Spector 360 on the school district's computer network won't be realized until years from now, when students are adults and look back at an education they DIDN'T miss, thanks to a software program used to hold them accountable for their actions.

"Instead of playing games," said Hunt, "they now listen to the teacher."



SpectorSoft offers PC and Internet monitoring and surveillance solutions for education, business, government and home users.

To learn more, and see how Spector 360 monitoring software can help solve your workplace Internet abuse and productivity issues, please visit spector360.com.

Learn more about SpectorSoft monitoring and surveillance solutions for business at spectorsoft.com

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