

JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Bomgar Critical for Health Researchers in the Field

As members of the number one public health academic and research program in the world, the students and faculty of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health play an important role in the research and resolution of critical public health issues in communities across the globe. And, unlike their counterparts at most other universities, the school's 50-person IT team is tasked with supporting more than 5,000 students, staff, and faculty in the classroom and in the field.

"At first glance, our team functions like any other university IT team, with a walk-up service desk and call center. But when you factor in that many of the people we are supporting are in remote countries conducting research and addressing public health issues, IT support takes on new significance." JP Garvin, Associate Director of Information Systems

THE CHALLENGE

In 2008, the IT support team realized that they were becoming more and more limited by the traditional support delivery methods they were using. While their walk-up support capabilities worked fine for on-campus incidents, they struggled to provide a high level of support to the growing number of students and faculty in the field.

Whether researchers are in a bustling city in India or a remote village in Uganda, the challenges of supporting researchers in the field are numerous: Network connections are often slow and inconsistent, and phone access may not be available. In addition, many research teams maintain their own secure portals on the university's network via Microsoft SharePoint to organize and store information and enable joint collaboration with outside parties. The ability for researchers to access data stored on these portals is crucial to being able to quickly respond to a global health threat.

In the past, the school's front-line support staff (roughly 15 of the 50-person IT team) used the limited remote control capabilities included with Windows and their systems management solution for support. However, with a drastic increase in the number of researchers needing support, the team realized they needed a more powerful remote support solution.

THE SOLUTION

The remote desktop support solution they were seeking had to be able to connect to systems outside of the local network environment. The IT team also sought an opt-in solution that could be installed on machines currently out in the field so as not to require researchers to install software prior to leaving. Lastly, the team wanted a system that offered ease of installation and would be able to function in a virtual environment in partnership with the school's disaster recovery and high availability requirements.

Garvin found out about Bomgar at an HDI conference in 2007 and later viewed a presentation and live demonstration on a fellow member's success with Bomgar at a meeting of HDI's Higher Education Forum. After testing the solution, he and the rest of the team found it to be the only solution that met their strict requirements.



"In the event of a pandemic or other emergency, we needed to know that even if the university closed down, we would be able to support our researchers."

Dawson Randle,
Manager of
Client Services

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Bomgar's appliance-based technology provided an ideal solution for the school's support demands. In addition to providing simplified remote support, Bomgar was able to support multiple operating systems being used in the field, including Windows PC, Mac and Linux. Deployment was simple: With some minimal interface changes to tailor the solution to the school's unique needs, Bomgar was up and running in less than a day.

THE RESULTS

Today, the IT support team at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health is able to provide the same quality of support to students and faculty calling in from Botswana as they are to those calling in from an on-campus research building.

With the more than 1,000 SharePoint portals for research centers and other groups expected to double in number soon, the team is exploring uses for Bomgar that go beyond the standard remote control session. The school has recently begun conducting localized training sessions on how to administer these portals using Bomgar's built-in demo mode. In addition, the school's distance education and multimedia groups are considering the use of Bomgar for desktop configuration training for students.

In the future, the team plans to integrate Bomgar with existing Active Directory credentials as well as their ticketing system, BMC Service Desk Express, to further streamline the process of support and help desk management.

All post-support surveys have yielded positive reviews of the Bomgar experience. Even the most troublesome support calls now seem to end on a happy note. In fact, the IT support team received a glowing recommendation from staff member JP Garvin, an Associate Director of Information Systems, who was formerly one of their most outspoken critics; "When your toughest critic takes the time to call and say they're amazed by how quickly and easily you were able to resolve an IT issue, you know you've got the right mix of support tools in place."

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