FINDING THE CURE
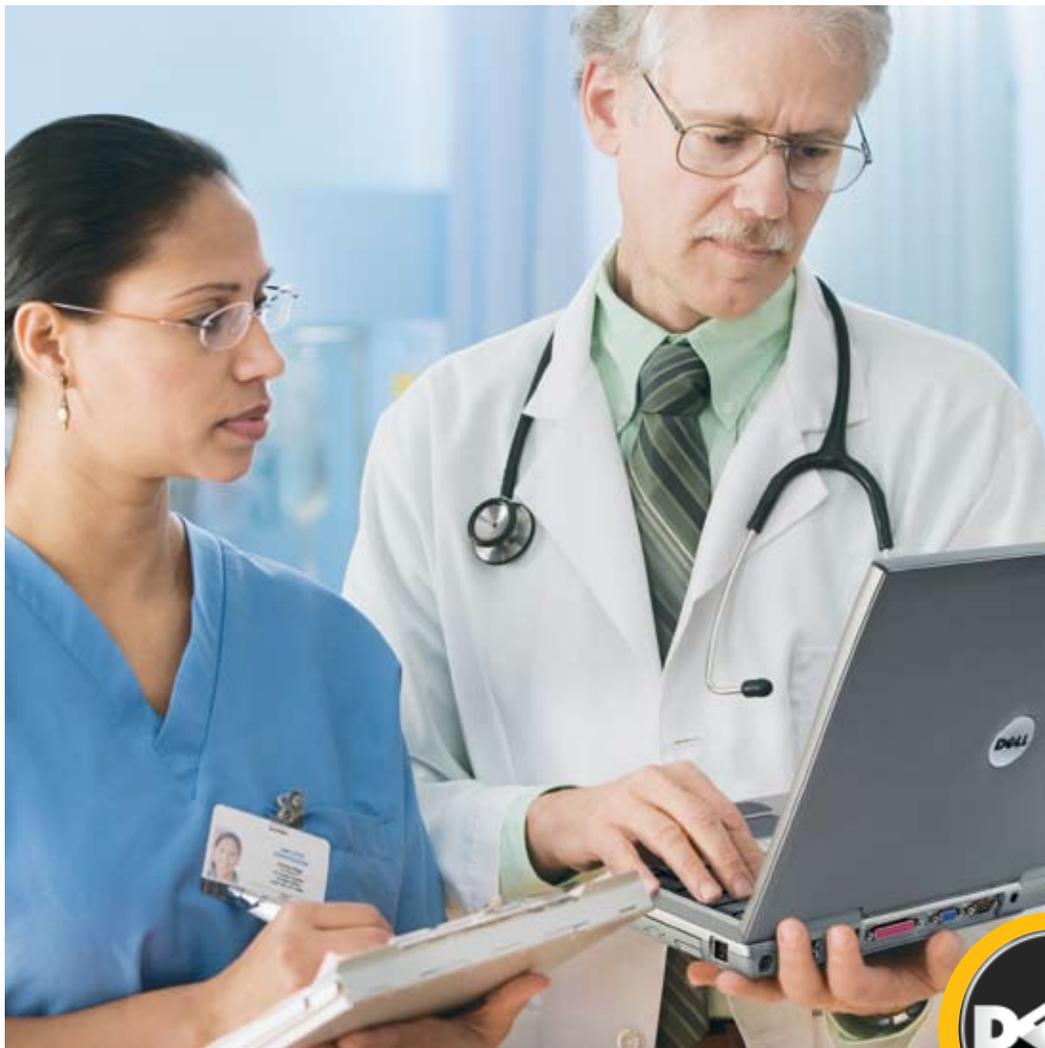
Dell services help worldwide medical research company ICON Clinical to speed its software image updating process by 50 percent

icon

CUSTOMER PROFILE

COUNTRY: United States

INDUSTRY: Healthcare

FOUNDED: 1990

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 6,600

WEB ADDRESS: *www.iconplc.com*

CHALLENGE

Updating ICON's standard software image, configuring new client computers, and deploying new applications had become labor-intensive and time-consuming, threatening to overburden the company's limited IT staff.

SOLUTION

Using Dell™ X-Image and Custom Factory Integration (CFI) services, ICON streamlined imaging, simplified new PC configuration, and eliminated a software deployment backlog.

BENEFITS

Get IT Faster

- Dell X-Image service improves image refreshing time by 50 percent
- Dell CFI speeds configuration by 86 percent on new PC deployments

Run IT Better

- CFI helps ensure that newly installed computers work right the first time
- Dell enables ICON to cut new application deployment from two months to two weeks

Grow IT Smarter

- Dell services free the ICON IT staff for planning and other high-value projects

DELL

Many of the world's top pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies depend on ICON Clinical plc (ICON) for strategic development, management, and analysis of programs that support clinical development—from compound selection to Phase I-IV clinical studies. ICON currently has over 7,000 employees, operating from 71 locations in 38 countries.

"DELL HELPED US PUT IMPROVED PROCESSES AND TOOLS IN PLACE TO ENABLE US TO ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS WITH OUR EXISTING STAFF, EVEN AS THE COMPANY CONTINUES TO GROW."

Ray Craven, senior manager of global desktop management, ICON Clinical plc

Technology is essential to ICON's mission, not only in the laboratory but also at the desktop and in the field. Many ICON employees carry laptops with them as they visit customer sites to check on research projects or collect clinical data. To ensure employees have the most current tools, ICON refreshes its desktop and laptop software images four times a year.

The images are updated and deployed by a three-person client management team that also fills employee requests for new applications and configures new computers as part of the company's regular hardware refresh program. These tasks became more demanding as the company grew. With more than 6,500 client computers spread over 71 worldwide offices, the team was hard-pressed to keep images refreshed each quarter, and began to fall behind on new system configuration and application requests as well.

REFRESHING AND DEPLOYING SOFTWARE IMAGES OVERBURDENS A LIMITED STAFF

The ICON team first tried to streamline its imaging process by standardizing on Dell™ OptiPlex™, Dell Latitude™, and Dell™ Precision™ clients, developing a standard core image, and installing Altiris®

deployment software. These measures helped, but they didn't solve the problem. "Standardizing on the Dell hardware was a big step forward," says Ray Craven, senior manager of global desktop management at ICON. "But with 15 different configurations, it still took us a full month each quarter to get everything built and tested."

The hardware refresh program also consumed more IT staff time than Craven was comfortable with. "We had to take each new system out of the box, boot it up on the network, download the image, reboot the machine, add drivers, and repeatedly reboot as we added more software," says Craven. "The process took an average of an hour and 25 minutes for each computer."

A BACKLOG OF SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS WAITING TO BE PACKAGED

Craven was also concerned that employees were waiting as long as two months to receive new applications. "Because we deploy the applications remotely, we have to package, configure, and thoroughly test every new application," says Craven. "If something goes wrong during a remote deployment, it can be very time-consuming to troubleshoot."

HOW IT WORKS

HARDWARE
- Dell™ OptiPlex™ desktop computers with Intel processors
- Dell Latitude™ laptop computers with Intel processors
- Dell™ Precision™ mobile workstations with Intel processors

SOFTWARE
- Altiris® Client Management Suite

SERVICES
- Dell X-Image
- Dell Custom Factory Integration

With a backlog of 50 applications to be packaged, the ICON team experimented unsuccessfully with hiring a contract service. "We tried them for six months, but they were no faster than we were," says Craven. "We needed a better way."

The ICON team turned to Dell for ideas. Because they already knew Dell's capabilities, the team was comfortable asking Dell for advice. "Dell has provided practically all our desktops and laptops over the past five years, and they've been good at suggesting new technologies that can help us grow," says Craven. "Dell took the time to fully understand our imaging challenges and then came up with several options, which is something you don't often get with other vendors."

ICON CHOOSES DELL TO STREAMLINE IMAGING AND SIMPLIFY DEPLOYMENT

The Dell team proposed solutions to each of ICON's challenges: streamlining image-building through the Dell X-Image service, simplifying new hardware deployment with Dell Custom Factory Integration (CFI), and providing timely packaging service for new applications. Using the Dell X-Image process, Dell could make ICON's new standard image hardware-independent so that it would support all the different Dell product lines in use at ICON. The ICON team could then order systems directly from the Dell factory with the image already in place, using the Dell CFI service. Dell proposed to ship the new equipment to ICON's regional centers around the world, reducing the amount of shipping performed by ICON personnel.

To speed application request fulfillment, Dell proposed to perform all of the software packaging required to get new applications ready for Altiris-based deployment. The Dell team's knowledge of Altiris enabled them to streamline software configuration and testing processes.

Craven decided to use Dell for all three services to save time and offload tasks from his limited staff. The transition to working with Dell was quick and easy. "We already had processes in place, and I thought it would be a challenge to change over," says Craven. "But it was really quite easy—for example, because Dell team members were familiar with Altiris, they were able to go over the custom scripting we had previously developed and help us decide what to keep."

DELL X-IMAGE SERVICE IMPROVES IMAGE REFRESH TIME BY 50 PERCENT

With the new suite of services from Dell in place, the ICON team has been able to streamline processes and save time in several areas. For example, the Dell X-Image program shaved approximately two weeks off the time required to build and test a new core image. "What used to take us close to a month on our own now takes Dell about two weeks," says Craven. "That's a 50 percent improvement."

CUSTOM FACTORY INTEGRATION SPEEDS CONFIGURATION BY 86 PERCENT ON NEW PC DEPLOYMENTS

Using Dell CFI has also delivered significant time savings for ICON. "When we get new PCs from Dell, technicians at our regional centers make a few simple configurations to cover local or regional settings and the new computers are ready to ship to individual offices and employees," says Craven. "Our technicians used to take an hour and 25 minutes to configure each machine, and now it's down to 10 minutes."

CFI HELPS ENSURE COMPUTERS WORK RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

The CFI program not only speeds deployment of new machines, but also helps ensure trouble-free operation. When the ICON team orders a new system, the Dell factory installs one of five system preparation files corresponding to the five different domains within the ICON computing environment. Later, when the computer is plugged in at the user's site, the system will boot up and automatically join the correct domain. "That's a huge time-saver, but more important, it helps ensure the computer will work right the first time," says Craven. "That's especially important at some of our remote offices where there is little or no on-site IT support."

DELL HELPS ICON CUT APPLICATION DEPLOYMENT FROM TWO MONTHS TO TWO WEEKS

Using Dell for software packaging has dramatically reduced the time it takes to deploy new user-requested applications and eliminated ICON's backlog. "Instead of waiting a couple of months before receiving their applications, users typically have them within two weeks now," says Craven. "That includes not only applications requested by ICON employees, but also software requested by our clients. Many external clients need Web-based applications to access our systems or to enable our scientists to access their data."

DELL SERVICES FREE THE ICON IT STAFF FOR OTHER PROJECTS

The Dell X-Image service has given time back to the ICON client management staff for high-level work. "Dell helped us put improved processes and tools in place to enable us to accomplish our goals with our existing staff, even as the company continues to grow," says Craven. "It's given us time to implement more capabilities within Altiris and evaluate a new security suite."

An added benefit is the strong working relationship that members of the ICON client management group have developed with their Dell counterparts. "We're continuing to build on our successful collaboration, and I talk to our Dell account rep on a weekly basis now," says Craven. "In IT, there are a lot of phone calls that you'd rather not get. But with the Dell team, we actually look forward to it."

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