

Flexible and Secure

A California county streamlines identity and access management for greater efficiency.

In today's environment, governments must work efficiently. San Bernardino County, Calif., is one government organization that is doing just that by simplifying the management of user access to county IT systems.

San Bernardino County is the largest county in the U.S., and the county's 40 departments provide services to more than 2 million residents. With many of those agencies maintaining sensitive citizen information, such as data related to foster care, health and legal services, it's crucial that the county have a strong identity and access management system to ensure only users with a legitimate need to access certain systems can get into them.

Without the right tools, managing the policies that control user access could be extremely arduous for IT staff, requiring a choice between good security and cost-efficiency. But San Bernardino County's Information Services Department (ISD) has accomplished both, using tools from Quest Software to delegate routine administrative tasks, streamline policy configuration and reporting, and maintain security across the organization.

Delegating Routine Provisioning

One approach San Bernardino County ISD has taken to simplify identity and access management and provide better services to agencies is to let staff outside of ISD manage their own e-mail boxes. However, when the county deployed Microsoft Exchange 2007, a change in the program's security model impacted ISD's ability to grant administrative rights to the departments.

"We had to find a new, secure way for people to manage their own e-mail boxes in our environment," said Jake Cordova, division chief of the Core Solutions and Security Division within the ISD, which provides management of directory services such as Microsoft Active Directory (AD), Microsoft

Exchange, messaging services, desktop support and various other mission-critical, enterprise systems for all county agencies.

Quest ActiveRoles Server (ARS) allowed the county to grant the proper privileges to customers without giving up control of its system.

"It made it much simpler for us to delegate—in a really granular fashion—specific rights to do administrative tasks without giving them full administrative rights to our Exchange environment," Cordova said.

County agencies also use ARS to manage the provisioning of network logon accounts in Active Directory, even though some agencies do not have their own ADs but have accounts that reside within ISD's directory, said Michael Mouser, lead systems support analyst with the Core Solutions and Security Division.

"ARS saves us from having to create those accounts for them," Cordova explained. "We can delegate their rights, and they can create their accounts in areas of our directory that

we designate specifically for them and with specific requirements already in place."

For example, according to Mouser, ISD can require that user accounts be automatically populated with certain attributes, such as the department name and address, which saves time for the administrators within the agencies setting up those accounts.

ARS also helps staff be more efficient without sacrificing security. For example, ISD can provide staff limited administrative privileges so it can accommodate common support requests, while providing higher-level access to technical analysts who need to manage accounts in a more detailed manner.

The tool is used by as many as 100 county employees to manage more than 15,000 AD accounts. "As a top-level IT organization, it allows us to provide services to other county departments at a level that's needed by those departments," said Mouser.

The reaction to ARS from administrators who use it has been very positive, said



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Cordova. “They like that it’s Web-based,” he said. “They don’t have to install tools directly on their computer, and they can administer from multiple locations because it uses a Web page rather than an installed application. They appreciate the flexibility.”

Simpler Administration

San Bernardino County ISD is also using several other tools from Quest to simplify administration of identity and access management policies and gain greater insight into how its security policies are being applied.

ISD’s technical staff uses Quest GPO-ADmin to develop group policies, which govern what users can and cannot do on the network. GPOADmin allows ISD staff to configure group policies more quickly and ensure that configuration changes won’t adversely affect the county’s network.

“Group policy misapplied and misconfigured can be detrimental to the health of your infrastructure and your network,” Mouser said. “Using GPOADmin, technical staff can

develop a group policy and have it reviewed by higher-level technical staff before implementation so nothing is missed and no detrimental settings are applied.”

ISD also monitors any changes that are made with Quest ChangeAuditor for Active Directory, which tracks, audits, reports and alerts on configuration changes, so the ISD can instantly know who made what change, when, where and why.

“As a technical security division, we have to be able to provide accountability to the different departments,” Cordova said.

GPOADmin, ChangeAuditor and reporting tools provided by Quest help the ISD provide information to other departments about the security policies being applied to their operations and also help ISD make better decisions internally. Previously, Cordova said, the data would have to be collected manually and placed in report format, making the process so time-consuming that ISD couldn’t compile and report on all of the data it wanted.

Flexibility Meets Demands

Tools from Quest give San Bernardino County the ease of management, security and detailed control that it needs. And they offer the flexibility necessary to fit the county’s work environment.

“What impressed us with ActiveRoles, in particular, is how easily customizable it is,” Mouser said. “That is a key piece of it meeting our needs.”

Cordova agreed. “The code isn’t closed, so we’re able to write scripts, and change the look and feel to accommodate our needs. We customized the user interface and some of the underlying functionality,” he said. “That’s all built into the product. It was easy to grab sample code and guidelines through Quest and their user community. Customizing the user interface is as easy as ‘click here to customize this form.’”

He said that since San Bernardino County began working with Quest about two and a half years ago, many of the county’s recommendations for new features and functionality have been incorporated into the tools. Some of the tools the county is using were purchased from a company that was later acquired by Quest, but the county decided to stay with Quest because of the company’s willingness to meet the county’s needs as the product line transitioned to Quest.

“Quest was willing to be flexible,” Cordova said, “and works with us to help us accomplish our goals.”

Quest

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