

»» Connecting with Rural America



America's farms are the economic foundation of the nation's heartland, and with innovations in agriculture requiring significant new investment, it's more important than ever that today's farmers have access to ready financing. Financial services from Farm Credit Services of America help farmers in Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, and Wyoming keep up with new technologies. To help itself stay on the leading edge when conducting its own business, FCSAmerica deployed comprehensive system-management solutions from LANDesk Software.

A Wide Ranging Network Spanning Four States

From 45 offices spread across four states, FCSAmerica provides a wide range of financial services to its farmers, including farm mortgages, operating loans, equipment loans and leases, building and grain storage financing and crop insurance. Such a portfolio of services means a constant flow of essential data moving through FCSAmerica's 900 PC and 300 server network. To ease maintenance tasks, they've standardized their network environment.

"We use only one operating system for the servers and one for our PCs," says FCSAmerica's PC Integration specialist Peter Maudlin. "But without LANDesk® Management Suite it would be a maintenance nightmare to keep track of the state of each server and each PC."

A New Day, A New Way

Not so long ago, that maintenance nightmare was real. FCSAmerica had no consistently reliable system for controlling software upgrades to its many workstations. But that changed when the company's PC Integration Specialist attended a trade seminar on LANDesk® Management Suite, and returned with a demonstration disk, which greatly impressed the FCSAmerica IT team.

Within just 15 days, a full-scale rollout was implemented – and the difference was immediate. "LANDesk® Management Suite allowed us to automate software and operating system distributions in a controlled manner," Maudlin relates. "With the use of Application Policy Management (APMs) and reports, we no longer needed to worry about whether each PC received new software. When you use APM the queries rerun themselves. Any new PC on the network that becomes a client and that meets the criteria of the query is immediately added to the list of targets that need to have software installed. "Not only that,"

Business Needs:

- A comprehensive system management solution to maximize the capabilities of a minimal IT staff maintaining 900 PCs and 300 servers over a network in 45 offices and four states.

Solution

- LANDesk® Management Suite

Business Benefits

- Eliminates the need for office-to-office travel for deployment of new software or system upgrades
- Dramatic reductions in in-person service time, with concomitant cost savings
- Speed of new deployments is greatly increased over past performance

Maudlin continues, “but the APMs allow us to customize the command line and we’re able to point the install to a Microsoft Installer (MSI) that is on our distributed file system. Because the MSI is preconfigured, there are no prompts or questions for the user. It becomes seamless – and updates are a snap. They literally take care of themselves.”

Rapid Deployment and Rapid Payback

The deployment of LANDesk® Management Suite went so smoothly, and worked so well, that FCSAmerica’s return on investment (“ROI”) was just two months, rather than the four months they had anticipated. “LANDesk® Management Suite’s remote control for the tech support team, the operating system deployment module, and software distribution are the reasons why we’ve had such a great ROI,” says Maudlin. “PC error resolution was a lengthy and tedious process – but I’d estimate that LANDesk® Management Suite’s remote control has reduced the amount of time it takes for us to resolve network issues by 75 percent. Furthermore, it has also reduced the number of times tech support has to visit PCs by 90 percent.”

Since the original deployment, LANDesk® Management Suite has proven its value time and time again, rising to meet a procession of software challenges. “We’ve overcome many enterprise challenges since we deployed Management Suite two years ago,” Maudlin notes, “including a simultaneous operating system deployment and a new hardware rollout. In the past we’d been tasked with one or the other, but recently we were able to complete a full OS deployment with a simultaneous laptop replacement. We deployed Windows XP Pro to all of our PCs and replaced every laptop with new hardware, and the LANDesk Management Suite OSD module made this possible.”

Network-Wide Deployment Simplified

With a project of such far-reaching scope, challenges came early. “First we needed a single image for all our hardware platforms,” relates Maudlin. “Whether it was a laptop or a desktop, Dell or IBM, we wanted to have only one image to maintain. Second, we needed to package the base applications and the one-off applications into the MSI format, so we could deploy our base application software after the image process, with the base image itself consisting only of the OS and the essential hot fixes.”

Using Microsoft’s Sysprep and LANDesk’s OSD tools in combination, the single image deployment worked flawlessly for all FCSAmerica’s PCs. Combining the OSD tool with WISE Script Editor, Maudlin’s team was able to keep the base image in its simplest form, meaning substantial time savings across the deployment. “We could make base application changes quickly,” he declares, “without ever modifying or creating a new base image. This meant we could quickly deploy software updates to our users because we didn’t have to copy the large base image files to remote sites with limited bandwidth every time a software update came out.”

This seamless integration and cooperation between LANDesk® Management Suite and other tools, greatly smoothed the rollout/deployment project. “Each tool we used plugged into LANDesk Management Suite easily,” observes Maudlin, “complementing each other to create the all-encompassing tool we needed.”

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PC INTEGRATION SPECIALIST

FARM CREDIT SERVICES OF AMERICA

Eyes On The Future

The changes make a big difference in reducing maintenance headaches—but that's not the whole story. FCSAmerica also plans to use LANDesk® Management Suite to greatly smooth future software implementations. As the company continues to plan for future growth and the expansion of its services to its clients, new opportunities for business success mean that it is more important than ever to keep up to stay on the leading edge. As Maudlin declares, "In LANDesk® Management Suite we have the super-tool we need to deploy successfully. LANDesk® Management Suite allows so many other tools to "snap-in" to it that when we choose new tools, chances are they are going to snap right into LANDesk® Management Suite in one way or another!"

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