

Whangarei Girls' High School

Moves ahead with New Era and IBM

With close to 1100 students and more than 100 staff, Whangarei Girls High School is embracing IBM technology to enhance student learning experiences and to support the efficient operations of the school itself.

In 2011, Whangarei Girls High School's (WGHS) 280 Dell workstations were reaching the end of their lease and maintenance agreements and, in another year, their Dell servers would similarly be approaching their 'use-by' date.

At the same time the school's requirements for wireless networking was growing as students and staff became increasingly mobile around the campus. Plus more staff and students were using their own devices to access the school's network...the so-called BYOD (bring your own device) phenomenon.

In response to these pressures, the WGHS ICT Committee undertook a strategic review of their current situation and projected their requirements into the future.

"We like the fact that the team from New Era IT listened to what we had to say...they took the time to explain the various options we could select and made recommendations based on their experience. They didn't try to force any particular solution on us and genuinely wanted to give us the best fit for our needs."

Anne Cooper, Principal, Whangarei Girls High

"We had our own internal ICT resource," says Anne Cooper, Principal of WGHS and member of the ICT Committee, "but we were becoming nervous about having just one individual as our entire ICT support staff. When he went on break we had nobody to turn to. Plus we wanted to investigate newer technologies - such as wireless - and his expertise didn't cover this area. We knew about New Era, of course, as they are sponsors



of SPANZ (Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand) and have a high profile in the education sector. I asked some of my peers who were New Era clients about their services and received quite favourable feedback. In addition, our executive officer asked the same questions of other execs - they have a different set of criteria - and received similar reports."

As a result, WGHS invited New Era to perform an initial ICT audit and make preliminary recommendations.

Experience and Expertise

New Era is the nation's largest and most experienced provider of ICT solutions to the education sector. "We empathise with what schools need," says John Mansbridge, Business Development Manager at New Era. "Indeed, most of our management have education sector backgrounds and are ex-teachers ourselves. Schools want trouble-free networks that are highly available, flexible and scalable. Today's schools are bandwidth and processing-intensive with an increasing reliance on network-based teaching and operational support applications. They cannot afford down-time, or even systems slowdowns. That's why, when it comes to the servers and storage area networks (SANS), we work almost exclusively with IBM.

New Era has an established methodology for bringing schools up-to-speed with their ICT requirements based on the successful installation and support of IBM servers and networks at many hundreds of schools in New Zealand in the past 17 years. "We typically start with what we call a lite audit," explains Mansbridge. "We inventory the current configurations including hardware, software, operating systems, warranties, etc, quantify network traffic, examine storage capacities, document processes such as back-up and security procedures and even test the power protection (UPS) capabilities to ascertain if the system could survive an unexpected power outage. range of options for moving ahead."

Rather than preparing a voluminous report that gets bogged down in details, we provide an executive summary, as non-technical as we can make it, that outlines the current state of affairs and one that provides a range of options for moving ahead.

Consultation with WGHS Stakeholders

Once New Era had completed the audit, they worked closely with all WGHS stakeholders to identify the ICT solutions that would best support their vision for the school.

The most pressing issue was the workstation replacement. "We had a quote from our then current ICT person," explains Cooper, "but we weren't comfortable with the pricing.

New Era came on board and immediately located higher specified machines at a lower cost. Plus they were able to bundle the purchase with one of their support packages so that we could be assured of a standardised service for the life of the contract. So, after some negotiations, we replaced our workstations and ICT support over the holidays with virtually no disruption of service to staff or students."

At the end of the year, it was time to replace the aging Dell servers and upgrade their storage capabilities. "We tend to install and support IBM servers and SANs," says Mansbridge, "quite simply because, in our experience, IBM provides the best price/performance on the market. In this case we installed two physical IBM X3650 servers and an IBM DS3524 SAN. These particular units offer robust performance, they can scale up as necessary to support additional workloads and are very easy to manage. We also installed VMware ESX 5.1 to fully support a virtualised processing environment which gave us even more flexibility to manage WGHS's processing requirements."



IBM A Trusted Brand

"We selected IBM equipment on New Era IT's recommendation," says Cooper. "IBM is a known quantity, they have a stellar reputation and the pricing was within our budget." New Era installed and configured the new gear over the summer break, again with no disruptions to WGHS activities. In addition, WGHS has upped their support contract to 'Platinum' which includes a full-time New Era staff member on site every day.

But New Era's impact doesn't stop with hardware and support. "We value our staff and are firm believers in professional development," says Cooper. "Not only did New Era sponsor a number of workshops, seminars and site visits to other New Era client schools at the outset but they have continued to provide advanced training for our staff. We have a number of tech-savvy individuals in-house and we are investing in their professional development so that they can, in turn, transfer that knowledge to staff and students."

WGHS is now 'future-proofed' for at least three years. "We're not ICT experts," says Cooper, "so we could never be sure that our systems were the best fit for us. But with New Era we have confidence that what we have is the most appropriate solution, and their support has been excellent. In fact, we've lost count of the times that we've said "thank goodness for New Era."

Anne Cooper, Principal, Whangarei Girls High School

What Next?

Currently, WGHS is trialling wireless access and other initiatives that will add additional capabilities for students and staff.

AT A GLANCE

Key benefits for Whangarei Girls High School

- Servers, workstations and networks upgraded and 'future-proofed'
- Standardised, expert ICT support on-site, every day
- Professional development initiatives for staff
- Support for emerging technologies such as wireless and BYOD

IBM platforms & associated software

- 2 x IBM X3650 servers
- 1 x IBM DS3524 SAN
- VMware ESX 5.1

New Era IT Professional Services

- ICT audits and recommendations for moving forward
- Purchase, installation and configuring of workstations, servers and SANs
- 'Platinum' support package including full-time onsite support person
- 3 Year Development (Strategic) Plan
- On going professional development to 'educate the educators'



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