



State of Connecticut Judicial Branch:

Simple, Cost Effective Solution for Managing System Updates

PUBLIC SECTOR

The State of Connecticut's Judicial Branch information system administrators were struggling to keep all the servers healthy, secure, and up to date. Lacking automation tools to help, the IT staff was drowning in their attempts to manually detect, manage, and deploy security patches to each individual system.

Since the current approach to manually update the systems was virtually impossible, and the prospect of not updating the systems posed unacceptable security and downtime risks, management knew they had to find a tool to actively automate this task. However, when looking for an active vulnerability management solution, the judicial branch had to work within a number of constraints.

Cost was a major concern. Management was not only apprehensive about the initial purchase cost, but the ongoing costs in maintenance fees and the impact on an IT staff already stretched very thin. Finding a cost effective solution that would quickly return their investment and enable them to see and demonstrate the value of the system was extremely important.

The judicial branch also had to contend with updating systems from many different vendors. While they had the typical Microsoft suite of servers and applications such as Microsoft Exchange, SQL Server, and others, they also had numerous non-Microsoft systems such as Citrix and Adobe - as well as a number of home grown applications. To complicate things further, some of the systems were older versions, so they needed a solution that would maintain and update the security patches on those systems as well. All told, they needed a vulnerability management package that encompassed more than Microsoft solutions, and one that was sophisticated and deep enough to manage aging software applications.

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– Tom Downes

Another worrisome area was the complexity of adding a new system. They required a system that was both easy to use and easy to administer. The IT staff couldn't afford to spend a lot of time figuring out how to deploy a new vulnerability management system. Nor did they have time to learn a tedious administration interface or GUI, and adding additional staff was not an option. They needed a system that would be very easy to deploy and equally simple to operate.

The security of the solution was also a critical consideration. Management was very concerned about depending on an approach used by WSUS (Windows Software Update Services) and others where each server must individually go outside of the organization's secure network in order to obtain updates. The risks and security implications of such approaches, especially when some of the domains are externally facing was a big concern. To ensure key security issues could be addressed, the solution had to be based internally within its own network without requiring customized configuration of each system.



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With these and other requirements and constraints in mind, the team chosen to evaluate and select a vulnerability management solution looked at a number of products from the various leading vendors. Ultimately they selected Shavlik NetChk Protect. Not only did NetChk Protect prove to be the most cost effective solution to purchase and maintain, and the greatest value for the money, it met the other requirements better than the competing products. The team liked NetChk Protect's accuracy and flexibility, and how Shavlik NetChk Protect could easily scale to meet their needs. NetChk Protect was easily automating the tasks that they were once drowning in.

"We also really liked the GUI interface, particularly the rollback and history features. Being able to see the update history showing what patches were applied and when they were applied was a big benefit for us. We now have the ability to generate reports for internal audits or managers that show the exact state and health of our systems. We were never able to do that before," remarks Jane Gu, judicial branch platform analyst. With their new solution in place, administrators can easily manage the entire update process across all systems. Even the older systems versions and the non-Microsoft applications are smoothly updated.

The team also found Shavlik NetChk Protect to be flexible and powerful yet very simple. They were able to design the system and roll the product out themselves. "We found the design and rollout information on Shavlik's web site very helpful, and we were able to do the entire implementation ourselves. It was not complicated and we didn't require assistance or professional services for anything. It was simple and very fast to deploy and get operational, and there was no impact at all on the users," said Tom Downes, platform architect on the product selection team.

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"We also liked the secure approach taken by Shavlik NetChk Protect. Having an internal mechanism that is protected by multiple firewalls is more secure than other approaches we considered, so from that perspective alone, it was well worth selecting Shavlik" stated Downes.

The team selecting the vulnerability management solution also found the central management system essential. Prior to implementing Shavlik NetChk Protect, the Judicial Branch's update process had no centralized administration of any kind and was very time consuming to operate. There was no reporting mechanism, and no checks and balances to effectively plan what should be done, or see what actually was done. "Everything was done manually before and we could not continue that way. We simply would not be able to update our numerous systems without the central management capability found in NetChk Protect. It's the only way we can see to get our jobs done in a cost effective manner, we have definitely seen a timely return on our investment," indicates Downes.