

Bilfinger SE Client Management Ensures Efficient Use of Resources



Profile:

With nearly 800 subsidiaries across the globe, Bilfinger is transforming itself from a pure construction company to a provider of technical, commercial, and infrastructure services for the construction industry for the fields of manufacturing, energy, and water resource management.

Headquarters:

Mannheim, Germany

Website:

www.bilfinger.com

Solution:

Ivanti® DSM

Benefits:

- Drag and drop to create software packages
- Clone-tested pilot installations to ensure quality
- Deploy, skip, or remove individual patches and updates
- Save time through automation
- Fewer calls for on-site service



A Diverse Ecosystem

Bilfinger SE, formerly Bilfinger Berger, has expanded rapidly through recent acquisitions and is planning on continued growth. Many of its subsidiaries had previously deployed and maintained their software themselves, using manual procedures—a time-consuming and error-prone method that involved frequent on-site service requests. This is changing, with responsibility for software management tasks steadily being transferred to the Group’s central IT department.

Solutions from Ivanti play an important role in the process. “A software environment of this size is impossible to manage manually, or even with a collection of point solutions,” says Torsten Pfeiffer, who handles client and server management together with a co-worker at Bilfinger’s headquarters in Mannheim, Germany. The Ivanti DSM module has assisted him in carrying out this work since 2003, when it was known under the Enteo NetInstall name. Until recently, competing products from Microsoft and Baramundi had been used at certain locations within the enterprise

Less Staff Required

DSM lets administrators deploy and activate operating systems, applications, updates, patches, and user profiles across endpoints and servers—work that IT staff previously had to perform on-site. Bilfinger aims to drastically reduce

the amount of on-site support required as part of the ongoing Bilfinger Excellence initiative. “The key advantage is, with DSM, a small staff can manage and provide updates to a large number of clients and servers,” Pfeiffer explained. “Nobody wants to run from one computer to the next all day just to install updates for some Adobe application, for instance.”

A ‘small staff’ in this case means that two people can handle the nearly 100 servers and 6,000 clients currently managed by Bilfinger’s central IT department. And even though the number of centrally managed machines is slated to grow by a factor of five, Pfeiffer doesn’t see more than three additional employees being necessary—one in Mannheim, and up to two more to provide support in the US.

Quality, Flexibility, and Ease-of-use

Pfeiffer uses a recent server cluster project to illustrate how much time DSM saves. Migrating the new Bilfinger subsidiaries to a common platform for email, calendaring, contacts, and tasks made it necessary to install eight new Microsoft Exchange servers. Configuring just one of these servers takes an employee two full days. If, however, the server is stored on the DSM system, it can be replicated at any time. The time to configure each additional machine was reduced to just a few hours. Furthermore, several servers can be built at once.

Quality assurance is also very important to Pfeiffer. Using DSM to deploy software ensures that all the managed machines are identical to the tested pilot installation and thus free of bugs. The basic configuration is always changing, but it’s easy to implement those changes. For instance, patches and updates can be classified as critical or optional. They can be installed or removed for specific user groups. Pfeiffer also likes the modular architecture of DSM’s proprietary scripting engine, which lets administrators create scripts for software deployment using a drag-and-drop interface. DSM is practically invisible to end users. New computers are installed with what’s known as a ‘golden image’ from the central IT department at Bilfinger. Once the device logs into the company network, activation is a zero-touch process based on the employee’s status. Additional software can then be installed.

With Flying Colors

Despite Bilfinger’s high degree of satisfaction with DSM, it decided in early 2014 to subject the Ivanti solution to additional testing as part of its Excellence initiative. The external management consultancy had advised against following the path of least resistance and simply choosing the most widespread solution within the enterprise. Instead, users of each of the three client management solutions currently in use were asked to present the pros and cons of their solutions and evaluate cost-effectiveness. Baramundi was soon out of the running due to its poor scripting functionality. Ivanti was then able to beat out Microsoft by offering superior value for the money. The process culminated in Bilfinger adding an additional 31,000 Ivanti software licenses. The Group also plans to add additional Ivanti modules as well as Ivanti Service Manager in the future.

The Outlook

Bilfinger is steadily migrating its subsidiaries to the Ivanti solution one-by-one. The next milestone, which is scheduled for late 2014, calls for the migration of the 21,000 computers in the German-speaking countries of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland that have been cataloged with the Ivanti Discovery module. Bilfinger also plans to use the Ivanti Service Manager suite’s Service Catalog solution in the region. Service Catalog lets employees request services and applications on the intranet and obtain approvals from their superiors using automated workflows.

“With DSM, a small staff can manage and provide updates to a large number of clients and servers.”

— **Torsten Pfeiffer**
Infrastructure Architect, Bilfinger

The project has also developed an interesting twist. Bilfinger has decided to have its new computers delivered ‘pre-loaded’ in the future. This means hardware supplier Dell will pre-install the company’s golden image on new devices before they ship. Bilfinger’s decision will save time and money, especially for locations that don’t have any on-site IT staff, such as some of the company’s Scandinavian locations. Previously, Dell simply delivered the computers to

corporate headquarters, where staff configured them. Going forward, Bilfinger will no longer have to package up and re-ship the devices to their final destinations. This new procedure will also simplify taxation and customs.

Conclusion

Regardless of these details, the biggest advantage of using Ivanti remains Bilfinger's ability to save enormous amounts of time and resources. Through extensive automation with the attendant, Bilfinger also realized a reduction in costs. That's why Torsten Pfeiffer is confident that, once all 35,000 clients and 2,500 servers slated to be managed with Ivanti software have been migrated, he'll still be able to say: "I can't even remember the last time we had a complaint from the CIO about our client and server management."



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