ANNESE
INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

Challenge

Annese & Associates' clients didn't have the expertise or time to resolve their Group Policy inefficiencies. Annese recognized a strategic business opportunity—a new revenue stream based on consolidating and optimizing clients' Group Policy environments.

Solutions

GPO Reporting Pak
Group Policy Automation Engine

Results

New revenue stream leads to additional business opportunities

Target market extends beyond traditional client base

Pricing aligns with per-GPO billing model

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MARK AMYOT
Systems Engineer
Annese & Associates, Inc.

Organization

Annese & Associates, Inc. is an integrated communications systems provider. Based in Clifton Park, New York, Annese wraps professional and managed services around cloud, infrastructure, collaboration and data center virtualization solutions.

THE CHALLENGE

One of the commonalities among Annese's clients is they struggle with Group Policy inefficiencies.

"Group Policy has become the proverbial attic for many organizations because it's often full of clutter," said Mark Amyot, Systems Engineer at Annese.

"Active Directory debuted in 1999, yet it still doesn't offer a native monitoring tool that provides full visibility. Companies have been making Group Policy modifications for years, and those modifications often compound into a labyrinth that must be untangled before efficiency can be achieved. That's where Annese comes in. We've built a set of best practices around GPO analysis, and this approach has become so successful that it's part of our data center health check list."

THE SOLUTION

Annese conducted its first GPO analysis during a 1,000-seat VDI implementation in a New York state school district. The deployment was flawless, but logging into a desktop took 2 minutes 10 seconds, which was unacceptable.

"We looked into all possible problems, and Group Policy was the culprit," Amyot said. "We surveyed the market and discovered that GPO Reporting Pak was everyone's favorite solution for management."

The school district, which serves more than 10,000 students in eight schools, had 550 GPOs and 30,000 lines of code. Using SDM Software's GPO Reporting Pak, Amyot analyzed settings across GPOs and discovered most of the settings were redundant.

Using Group Policy Automation Engine, he created simpler, streamlined Group Policies and reduced the number of GPOs to 20.

"The only reason there are more than 10 GPOs is because each of the eight schools has its own browser setting for its home page," Amyot said. "The

beauty of using Group Policy Automation Engine is that I didn't have to create each GPO line by line because a PowerShell interface did all the work. Desktop login decreased to fewer than 30 seconds."

Following success with the school district, Annese created a GPO analysis process for new and existing clients.

"Our firm is in clients' environments for a lot of different reasons, so one of the routine questions our engineers ask is how long it takes to launch virtual desktops and services. Most of the time, this simple question results in a GPO analysis and remediation project where we provide clients with detailed insight and action into how they can restructure Group Policy and use it more efficiently, saving them time and money.

"For us, the assessment process is a tool to help customers identify where they can make improvements and more readily meet their business goals through technology and processes," Amyot continued. "Integrating the SDM Software solutions into our assessment process has enabled us to identify additional opportunities by illuminating GPO inefficiencies or clutter."

Annese's GPO analysis also enables the firm to target clients it might not have targeted in the past, such as organizations that must comply with regulatory requirements, including government, law enforcement and healthcare. Group Policy auditing compliance is easy with GPO Reporting Pak and Group Policy Automation Engine.

Amyot said a healthcare client tried using item-level targeting to apply Group Policy among its departments to reduce employee login time, but the attempt failed. Login could take up to 90 seconds, which isn't practical in a healthcare setting. GPO Reporting Pak indicated that 90% of the settings were the same across departments.

"I was able to show them what policies were slowing them down and how we could reorganize GPOs in Active Directory without using item-level targeting," Amyot said. "I restructured Active Directory with organizational units for user, computer and group accounts. Login time decreased to 10 seconds."

Amyot said clients are amazed and impressed with the opportunity to see the big picture rather than jumbled, disconnected GPOs. "When I show them reports generated by GPO Reporting Pak, they have visibility for the first time into Group Policy," Amyot explained. "Their Group Policy work prior to analysis was based on troubleshooting their old GPOs. I'm able to show them where the impacts were in terms of login time, performance and vulnerabilities regarding security. This is an easy value-add we can provide to clients. It helps us help them, and it pays off in spades."

THE RESULTS

New revenue stream leads to additional business opportunities

Conducting GPO analyses has put Annese into the data center assessment business. "GPO Reporting Pak makes it so easy to generate reports and show clients where they have inefficiencies and vulnerabilities," Amyot said. "And Group Policy Automation Engine makes it easy to optimize their Group Policy environments. Once clients see the value we've added regarding their GPOs, they ask us to take a look at the rest of their data centers."

Target market extends beyond traditional client base

Annese is reaching out to organizations it might not have targeted in the past, including those with strict auditing requirements. The combination of GPO Reporting Pak and Group Policy Automation Engine enables clients to report changes made to GPOs and settings to prevent uncontrolled modifications.

Pricing aligns with per-GPO billing model

GPO Reporting Pak and Group Policy Automation Engine are licensed per GPOs under management, which matches the way Annese bills clients. MSPs can use the solutions with as many clients as they wish, as long as they uninstall the solutions upon completion of each client project.