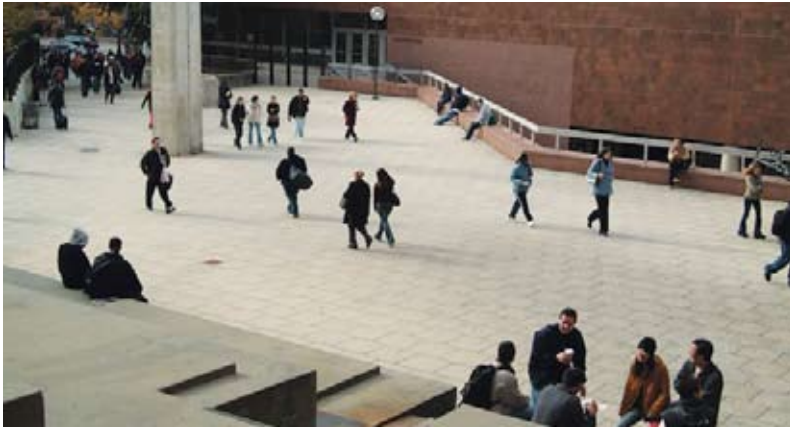


Borough of Manhattan Community College Modernizes Online Student Registration

Verastream Host Integrator provides custom rejuvenation of mainframe-based system



The Borough of Manhattan Community College is part of the large City University of New York complex of educational institutions. With a student population of about 22,000, BMCC needed to “fix” their online class registration system, which was causing headaches for students, faculty, and administrators.

Failing Grades for Performance

The web extension of the IBM mainframe-based registration system was both inefficient and unreliable, according to Ethan Dumeyer, information systems assistant at BMCC. Dumeyer, whose job is to maintain and enhance the system, said there were two main problems:

1. When students tried to log on to the web registration interface, called Panther, they would have to wait up to 30 seconds while the connection to the mainframe was established. “The end users were baffled by this,” Dumeyer said.
2. During heavy usage times, such as the recurring two-week registration periods, a student’s session could hang up, often right in the middle of a transaction. “It was as if the intense demand just burned out the applications,” reported Dumeyer.

Students were never sure if the unwieldy routine successfully completed their request or not, so some would start the whole process over again. It was not unusual for a student to finalize their registration while two or more sessions actually remained open. The result could be a class schedule with overlapping classes or times that conflicted.

In the meantime, registrars would call the IT department to say that students couldn’t manage all the difficulties with Panther and the existing back-end connection. Instead, students were resorting to manual registration, which required staff assistance. Dumeyer was constantly rebooting the servers in an effort to get performance back on track. But his connection-monitoring tools could never give him a complete picture of what was going on.

‘Is That Possible?’

These faults and frustrations all begged for a better solution. The college’s IT department researched a number of software products and then requested on-site demonstrations by three vendors. With performance and ease of use as the ruling criteria, BMCC selected Attachmate® Verastream® Host Integrator.

QUICK VIEW

Problem

Unacceptable user experience for mainframe-based class registration.

Solution

Used Verastream to create new online interface with load balancing and session pooling.

Results

- Enhanced usability and scalability for the registration system.
- Decreased impact on mainframe, web server, and network resources.
- More online registrations; less demand on staff.

The evaluation process included a proof of concept, which demonstrated BMCC’s Panther system running with Verastream Host Integrator in place. “We had no idea how fast it could be until we saw Verastream in action,” said Dumeyer. “When we watched all the mainframe screens flash by in such fast sequence, we had one question: Is that really possible?” That’s when Dumeyer and his team decided Verastream was the right solution for their problem.

Using Verastream Host Integrator

Because BMCC’s IT operation is small, they opted to use Attachmate consulting services for the initial technology transfer. “The Attachmate Verastream expert jumped right in, helping us build and implement the new web registration system,” said Dumeyer, who in the meantime was developing his own level of skill with Verastream. Now he can easily develop additional systems and enhance the college’s current applications whenever necessary.

Dumeyer described the steps taken at BMCC for selecting and labeling the series of mainframe screens needed for the new deployment. Verastream Host Integrator provides a graphical design tool to capture legacy functions—including screen navigations and data elements—in component form. “It actually automates the process,” said Dumeyer, explaining how Verastream did the prenavigation, mapped the screens, and extracted the application logic.

The Verastream design tool can independently determine the best path to a given screen. It can even define escape routes and alternate

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paths, triggered by legacy-application error conditions. “We found that Verastream was smart enough to navigate to any screen we needed, even if it resided eight mainframe screens deep,” Dumeyer said. “And the Verastream design environment made it easy for us to pull off recordsets that we couldn’t access with the older system.”

Just Like Online Shopping

With the Verastream Web Builder, you can generate and deploy web applications, component interfaces, and web services from the legacy functions you abstract using the design tool. That functionality allowed BMCC to take their existing web application code and integrate it with the default code generated by Web Builder to get the custom rejuvenation they needed.

Now, instead of dealing with a clumsy, unreliable registration system, students are using a system designed for point-and-click ease. In fact, it’s much like the Internet “shopping cart” experience familiar to any college-age user. Students can now add, drop, or change classes, check schedules, see course descriptions, and make tuition payments from Panther. System hangups are a thing of the past, even when users are working on a kiosk.

Another problem solved: schedules with conflicting class times. Because the Verastream solution easily integrates with the college’s database, BMCC can now prevent the multiple user logins that inevitably produced class schedules requiring students to be in two places at once.

Students like it because they are not locked in to their choices; they can return as often as they want during the registration period and rearrange their class schedules. “The new system demands less infrastructure overhead while enhancing reliability and user experience,” Dumeyer said. “Students get immediate access to the resources they need, but they don’t see the complex operations Verastream is performing behind the scenes.”

An ‘Incredible’ IT Tool

And from Dumeyer’s realm, the changes couldn’t be more welcome. “It used to be stressful when I couldn’t get enough information to assess the situation and

fix problems,” he said. For example, registrars often wanted to verify what happened with a given registration, but there was no way to track it down. The Verastream Host Integrator logging feature has changed all that.

“It’s incredible. Verastream lets us do inquiries so we can go back through the log and see just what steps the student took,” said Dumeyer. “Now I can get a 100-percent view into our registration system, so we can solve problems that we couldn’t even detect before.”

Final Exam: A+

BMCC’s most recent registration was the ultimate test of the new Verastream Host Integrator implementation. Although Dumeyer admitted he was nervous about the upcoming registration, he knew that he had done his homework. The result? It was BMCC’s most successful registration on record, thanks largely to Verastream.

Some 21,976 students got registered, and the college had as many as 16,000 using the new system in the course of a day. “In a strange way, it was disappointing,” joked Dumeyer. “I like to solve problems, but this time I had no problems to solve.”

About Verastream Integration Solutions

The Attachmate Verastream product line comprises a complete range of mainframe and web modernization tools—from basic rejuvenation to customized presentation and sophisticated high-performance integration. Verastream-generated services can be mixed, matched, and reused selectively to extend host functionality to new users or new composite applications. No code changes to existing applications are required, so you can avoid risk while speeding up application integration, application development, and workflow enhancement.

About Attachmate

Attachmate delivers advanced software for terminal emulation, application integration, and secure communications. Our NetIQ® business provides solutions for management of applications, enterprise systems, security, compliance, and operational VMware. With our technologies, more than 65,000 businesses worldwide are putting their IT assets to work in new and meaningful ways. www.attachmate.com.



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