Active Directory Consolidation

Active Directory is a service that provides a central location for network administration and security. It is the system that authenticates and authorizes all users at the University. Microsoft first released Active Directory in Windows 2000 Server. After extensive consultation at the time, IST decided to implement an active directory (ADS) and the Faculties decided on their own (Nexus).

Operating two active directory services however has proven to be costly, inconvenient and confusing to users. On the cost front, both ADS and Nexus require several fairly powerful servers (and backup servers) to operate. On the convenience/confusing front, when one uses IST’s Sharepoint server from a Nexus workstation, for example, a prompt for authentication will appear (this does not happen on a workstation in ADS because they are both in the same domain).

In response to the IT Task Force 2009, the Computing Technology and Services Committee (CTSC) recommended that the two active directories be joined into one. It was decided to keep Nexus and move all ADS computers, users, and services over to Nexus. A project charter was written and a team assembled in October of 2011. Much work has already been accomplished. Because AHS was already part of Nexus, workstations and users were already defined. But there is much work left to do.

The work that will have the most impact on AHS users is the migration of IST’s servers to Nexus. Of particular note are the Exchange server (where AHS users send/receive email, manage calendars, etc), Sharepoint, Quest, Learn, and the WCMS (web content management). On your office computer, authentication to these servers should be seamless, since you are logged onto Nexus (if you are a Windows workstation). We are trying to make this as seamless as possible but there will be hitches. Eventually there should be much less confusion about how to authenticate. Thank you for your patience in the interim.

Mail merge using Word 2010

Need to email a large amount of people with the same message? Microsoft Office’s “Mail Merge” will allow you to do this and add a little personalization to each e-mail with little to no extra effort.

How do you do this? Open up a blank Word document and click the “Mailings” tab at the top. Then select the “Start Mail Merge” drop down menu and choose “Step by Step Mail Merge Wizard”. From here it will guide you through selecting recipients from an Excel document, adding a greeting line, and finally writing and send the message. Notes: Make sure you have the e-mail recipients saved on an Excel spreadsheet. Add yourself to the spreadsheet so that you can be sure the message sent.

If previewing the message displays an incorrect greeting line, go back to “write your e-mail message”, remove the old greeting line, and add a new one, but this time click on the “match field section and set these greeting settings as desired.
Dell Desktop Rollover Deal

UWaterloo has negotiated with Dell a new desktop rollover agreement for office computers. The pricing and warranties that we have been able to negotiate are far better than what is currently available to other institutions or even regular customers. For example, the base computer configuration we have comes in at $840! That includes, an i3 Intel processor with 4GB of RAM, a 512MB video card, a 320GB Hard Drive and a 22” Widescreen monitor. For a mere $240 more, the specs are upgraded to an i7, 8GB RAM, 500GB Hard Drive and a 24” monitor. Normally, this system with the 4 year warranty would be over $1500. Please note that these deals are for UW purchases.

Troubleshooting your Computer

If you can’t figure out how to complete a particular task in your software program, the most important shortcut to know is the F1 key. Just push it while the program—Word, Excel, or whichever program you’re using—is open and active, wait a moment, and a Help window specific to your active program will appear. Check out the video Why F1 Buttons Helps.

MAC News

The Spinning Beachball of Death signifies to MAC users, “I haven’t crashed yet, give me a minute to figure things out”. If you haven’t rebooted in a while, now’s the time. Otherwise you’ll need to launch Activity Monitor and see what’s eating up resources. If you identify a program, then update it or do without.

If you wish to connect to your N: Drive from your MAC, we have written a script to simplify this process. Contact AHS Computing for details.

Issues with the new iPad running extremely hot up to 116F, have been overblown. Many laptops run at >120F therefore the iPad runs within acceptable limits.¹

Encryption of Mobile Devices

Recently, a memo from the provost outlined important information about encryption for mobile devices.

"Many of you will have seen reports from sister institutions of sensitive information being disclosed, leading to reputational embarrassment and damage, and substantial remedial work in notifying those whose personal information was disclosed," provost Geoff McBoyle wrote in a memo distributed March 20. “A significant area of vulnerability involves mobile devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones), many of which contain information classified by Policy 8 as restricted, such as student marks, your personal information, and so on. In order to protect this information in the event that your mobile device is lost or stolen, its internal storage, as well as any peripheral storage devices used, must be encrypted.”

AHS Computing is available to assist you with the encryption of your laptop or Blackberry device. You might want to consider encrypting USB keys or drives that contain personal or subject information. There are various methods of encryption available for each of the devices mentioned. However, currently there is no method of encrypting the iPhone or iPad; only the backups may be encrypted. If you plan on bringing your device to a member of AHS Computing to help with the encryption process, please backup your files in advance and be prepared to be without your device for a while (minimum of 24hrs for laptops). For more information, please visit, http://ist.uwaterloo.ca/security/encryption

Computer Jargon

LMS – Learning management system (eg, Desire to Learn (D2L) or Blackboard). Here at uWaterloo, the LMS is called Learn.

WCMS – web content management system (Eg, Drupal or Wordpress). The new uWaterloo websites are run by Drupal.

IDM – Identity Management System (Sun Identity Manager or Oracle Identity Manager). WatIAm is the identity management solution here on campus.

HRMS - Human Resource Management System (eg, Peoplesoft or SAP).

Windows 8 - The next version of Microsoft Windows, a series of operating systems produced by Microsoft for use on personal computers, including home and business desktops, laptops, Microsoft Tablet PCs, and Home theater PCs. The release to manufacturing (RTM) is expected around July 2012, three years after the release of its predecessor, Windows 7.