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C&S launches software targeting school IT costs

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SALINA—C&S Cos. is launching a new software product it believes will help school districts save thousands of dollars on information-technology costs.

The product, known as Fiddlehead, allows a single desktop unit to run up to five separate workstations with no loss of performance. Each workstation functions as if it were an independent machine, according to C&S.

Fiddlehead is the second software product C&S added this year. In February, C&S acquired Que Centre, LLC of Rochester, which develops Web-based, building-management software. Financial terms of the acquisition were not disclosed.

"We have been kind of moving toward the software world for a number of years," says William Brod, president of the Fiddlehead and Que Centre software groups at C&S.

C&S has patents pending on the Fiddlehead technology, which is contained within bright green cubes that connect the separate keyboards and mice to the parent desktop unit. Each Fiddlehead kit also contains a video card that allows the desktop to run the different monitors.

Although Fiddlehead has potential applications in a number of markets, C&S chose to focus on schools.

"Schools have great ... need to cut costs," says Rick Clonan, vice president of the eight-employee Fiddlehead Group at C&S. "They have a limited budget where they have to make those dollars stretch."

Fiddlehead not only allows schools to save by reducing the number of desktops they buy, it also cuts energy costs since there are fewer machines to run.

Once C&S decided to focus on the education market, the company further refined Fiddlehead to tailor it specifically for the classroom.

For example, the system includes teacher controls that allow instructors to view and control students' workstations. Students can also see what's on their teacher's screen and teachers can block students from accessing their workstations during instruction.

Software is a natural next step for C&S, given that its engineering and architectural units already work on designing and constructing school buildings.

"This whole venture is a logical continuation of what we do," says Nicholas Cerro, director of marketing for C&S. "This is taking C&S in new directions that this group will fully explore."

The company is also aiming to help schools on the software side. One of the unique elements of Fiddlehead is that it can run multiple operating systems simultaneously, including running Linux applications through Windows.

That gives schools access to a host of educational software applications developed specifically for Linux. Since Linux is an open-source system, the educational applications are free.

The Fiddlehead Group, with the help of the Center for Digital Literacy at Syracuse University, is building an index of Linux educational applications for its clients. So, Brod says, when teachers need an application to help teach algebra, they'll be able



PHOTO COURTESY OF C&S COMPANIES

The Fiddlehead software produced by C&S Cos. is used in a classroom setting. The program allows a single desktop unit to run up to five separate workstations with no loss of performance. Each workstation functions as if it were an independent machine.

to find it — and it won't cost them anything.

"We're giving them access to things they don't have access to today," he says.

SU's School of Education and CASE Center have also helped with developing the Fiddlehead product.

David Peterson began developing the system that would become Fiddlehead about 10 years ago while running his company, TekResource Service Corp of Ormond Beach, Fla. C&S acquired Peterson's company in January 2008, but actually began working with him to develop Fiddlehead more than a year ago.

Peterson is now chief technology officer for the Fiddlehead Group. Financial terms of the acquisition were not disclosed.

Peterson began his company some 20 years ago, selling PCs to schools. He quickly learned

of the budget constraints school districts face.

"My desire was to simply make it so that schools didn't have to replace PCs so often," he says. "I never did solve that. They still have to replace PCs just as often."

Fiddlehead, however, allows them to replace fewer machines.

Brod declined to comment on sales projections for Fiddlehead.

C&S, which does not disclose annual revenue, employs about 400. C&S provides services ranging from engineering and construction management to landscape design and energy auditing.

C&S's 75,000-square-foot headquarters is at 499 Col. Eileen Collins Boulevard in Salina, near the Syracuse Hancock International Airport. □

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