Happier Employees through Cross-Office Collaboration

Cross-Office BIM/CAD Collaboration by Eliminating Local Storage

Ray Sirois, IT Director at Wright-Pierce, has chosen and deployed the existing IT infrastructure that helped the multi-disciplined engineering firm grow from its roots in Maine into the award-winning firm of choice across New England and the Northeastern US. "Over the past decade or two, we have gone through several generations of technology improvements to make things work," Sirois said. "Since our first branch office opened, interoffice collaboration has always been important to us. It's the only way we know to get projects done!"

Early on, Wright-Pierce created a central data model so all offices could work on a common set of files. "How we delivered that central model is what has changed over the years. As we have grown, the collaboration demands of our project teams have certainly increased, and without a doubt, the file sizes of our client's CAD and BIM models have also increased. It seemed that every few years we would outgrow one combination of technology and be looking for what to engage with next!"

Fortunately for companies like Wright-Pierce, technology has advanced. Panzura represents the next generation, best-of-breed technology to keep multi-office project teams happily working together despite the geographical distances between them.

Outgrowing WAN Optimization

"We were beta testers and early adopters of WAN optimization technology," Sirois explained. "It was great for a time. We were able to meet our mission: Deliver projects using a central data model, even as the size of those offices and our file sizes grew geometrically."

Situation Snapshot:

- Engineering firm with 200+ staff across seven offices across New England.

- **Key applications:** Autodesk Revit, Autodesk Civil 3D, Navisworks, MEP, ESRI ARC GIS, SketchUp and large PowerPoint, JPEG and PDF files.

- **Key challenge:** Engineers needed to collaborate across offices, but despite continued investments in WAN optimization and fiber network links, many applications were still not fast enough.

Eventually for GIS, CAD, and BIM applications, WAN optimization – even with bigger internet pipes – was simply not robust enough. Slow network performance would start to show up on the list of contributing factors on post-evaluations. "We needed a whole new technological approach," Sirois said.

Faster Collaboration - An Easy Decision

Sirois began evaluating Panzura. "My first impression was that Panzura was just another file replication solution," he said. "But upon further investigation, and talking to another Panzura customer who was in the same type of business that we are in, I learned Panzura really is a different animal!" With Panzura, the architecture is different, and there is no overhead traffic on the company's LAN or WAN links. "The central authoritative copy of our data is in inexpensive cloud storage, and maintaining that is very efficient with Panzura's approach."

"After digging in on the details, Panzura was so clearly the next big thing for us, it only took a 15-minute presentation to the Board of Directors for them to approve the largest single purchase I've made in 20 years with the firm," said Sirois. Collaboration and file access – even for the most complex CAD, BIM, and GIS projects – became much easier for the company's engineers and design staff.

A month or two after Sirois deployed Panzura, Board members told him, "We have employees coming up and saying, 'Thank you for approving that purchase!' Good move, that system has really made a difference."

Robust file and element locking was also critical to Wright-Pierce's success. Panzura's Distribute File Locking and caching capability meant the company could deliver LAN performance for shared data across offices, allowing engineers to work simultaneously on the same project in CAD, Revit, or ArcGIS.

With Panzura, Wright Pierce was able to:

- Gain instant file access and collaboration across all offices.
- Improve engineer job satisfaction. IT received "thank yous" from CAD and GIS users.
- Eliminate costly private network links and expensive WAN optimization upgrades.
- Avoid unpredictable storage purchases – storage shifts to the cloud.
- Consolidated backup and DR to the cloud, saving significant time and expense.

Employees on Cloud Nine

Wright-Pierce's engineers are also getting more work done across offices, even in their most challenging location in Middletown, CT. "When we installed Panzura, our CT office had the worst Internet connection of all the offices," said Sirois, "I saved that one for last, as I thought it might go a bit rougher than the others." But on that first day, after deploying Panzura, Ray asked one of the relatively new CAD Designers how his day was going, and he said, "Today's been the best day of work at Wright-Pierce since I started!"

Consolidating to the Cloud

Prior to Panzura, Wright-Pierce was already using a cloud gateway appliance for backup to Amazon S3 cloud storage. Sirois explained, "Deploying that went smoothly. So, entrusting our production data to the cloud with Panzura appliances, was the next logical step."

"From a profitability perspective, Panzura's model really works short term and long term." Sirois asserts that now, and into the future, Internet bandwidth will always be cheaper than interoffice private WAN links or MPLS. "Plus, storage purchases are always very difficult. With 3D models, animations, point clouds, and LIDAR data, I can't predict what our storage needs will be for the next 3 to 5 years. It is expensive to under-buy; it is expensive to over-buy, and it is impossible to guess it just right!"

Consolidating storage to the cloud eliminated those concerns for Wright-Pierce. The company also benefits from the built-in disaster recovery and backup capability of the cloud for no additional cost. Regarding cloud data security, Sirois asserts, "Anyone who has researched this subject knows, cloud storage is more secure than we can provide in our own data centers. That horse left the barn years ago!"

"Empowering our organization to be more collaborative, measurably improving each individual's performance, a pay-for-what-we-use approach to storage and backup on a geographically diverse central storage model, makes Panzura a remarkably profitable platform for us," explains Sirois.

About Wright-Pierce

Wright-Pierce is an award-winning engineering firm specializing in water, wastewater and infrastructure services for public and private clients throughout the Northeast. The employee-owned company has been in business and now has over 200+ engineers and support professionals in seven offices across New England.

About Panzura

Panzura is the catalyst in the transformation of cloud storage into high-performance enterprise file systems. Panzura's revolutionary distributed file locking system seamlessly combines the flexibility, performance and productivity benefits of distributed storage with the manageability, security and economics of centralized storage.

With Panzura, the cloud – public or private – not only serves as every tier of storage, it becomes the fabric that enables globally distributed teams rapid file access and easy collaboration. Panzura delivers one file system across hundreds of offices that allows users to work together as if they were in the same room. For more information, visit www.panzura.com.

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