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Simplifying IT operations for the University of Derby with managed Apple technology

The Context

The University of Derby is a major UK university, with a body of nearly 30,000 students.

To support the learning experience, the university operates a small number of student Mac labs, with a further 100 devices used by staff. While art and design students have historically been the main beneficiaries of this, students and staff on other courses, including sports studies and mathematics, are increasingly taking advantage of the flexibility and power of the Apple Mac estate to empower their learning and teaching.

Most of these devices are deployed in dedicated Apple Mac labs, except for around 50 MacBooks which are lent to students on a short-term basis.

The Challenge

The University of Derby regularly conducts internal reviews of IT processes, seeking to identify areas where new efficiencies and advances in technology experience can be realised. As a longstanding Academia customer, when the university needed additional help managing their Apple device estate, they knew exactly where to look.

The university had previously relied on in-house resources to manage device rollouts throughout the summer, but this took considerable time and inevitably diverted IT personnel from other projects that equally needed to be tackled during the recess.

At the same time improvements in patching of the Apple estate had also been identified by the university's Security and Operations Centre.
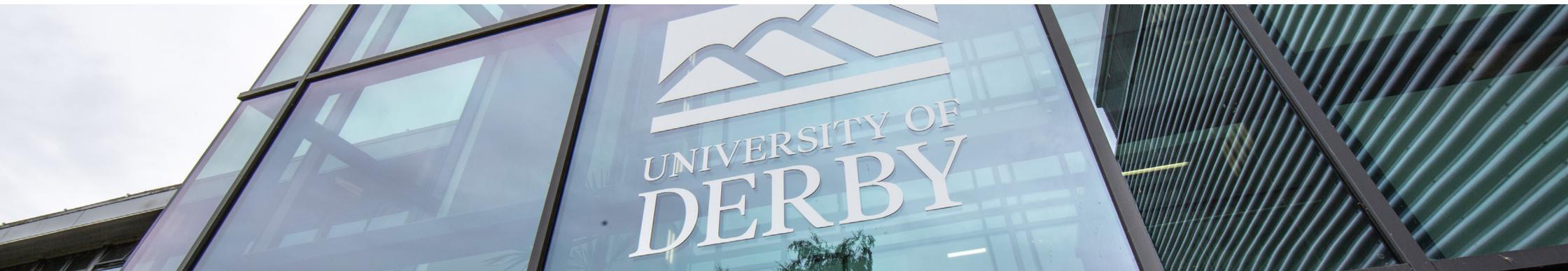
The Solution

Orchestrating the summer refresh

Since the beginning of Academia's relationship with the university, device refreshes have been an important part of the service provided. For this, the university required assistance from Academia to manage the entire project, rather than solely supplying the devices.

In the summer of 2024, the university needed to refresh approximately 120 devices, as well as supporting peripherals. This needed to be completed while students were not on campus, so the refresh didn't affect students' learning.

In addition to deploying new hardware, the university updated software and operating systems across the entire estate to ensure a consistent and seamless experience for both students and staff.

Academia's expert team took charge of the rollout, configuring devices, coordinating delivery to the right parts of the campus and setting them up in the university's computer labs.

To maximise the commercial value of outgoing devices, all hardware was wiped, refurbished and resold, generating valuable rebates for the university to help fund the cost of new devices.

This end-to-end service has been instrumental in helping the university ensure that the refresh went smoothly both operationally and financially. As Dale Baker, Digital Operations Manager at the university, says: "Academia's support has been a massive value to us, helping us through a busy summer at an important time".

Providing expert IT support

Given Academia's role in helping to roll out new Apple devices, supporting them during the academic year was an obvious next step.

> **"**
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> It was a natural alignment to start a conversation with Academia about delivering a managed service, plugging a gap in our own resource and adding further value to us in doing so.
>
> **Dale Baker**
> Digital Operations Manager
> University of Derby

Academia now fully manages the Apple estate for the university. As the IT team maintains oversight on support requests, they act as the first line of support, triaging requests and, where necessary, passing them on to Academia's expert team. This maintains the benefits of a first-line in-house support offering while freeing up time for the IT team to focus on other projects, allowing the team to concentrate on value-added work for the university.
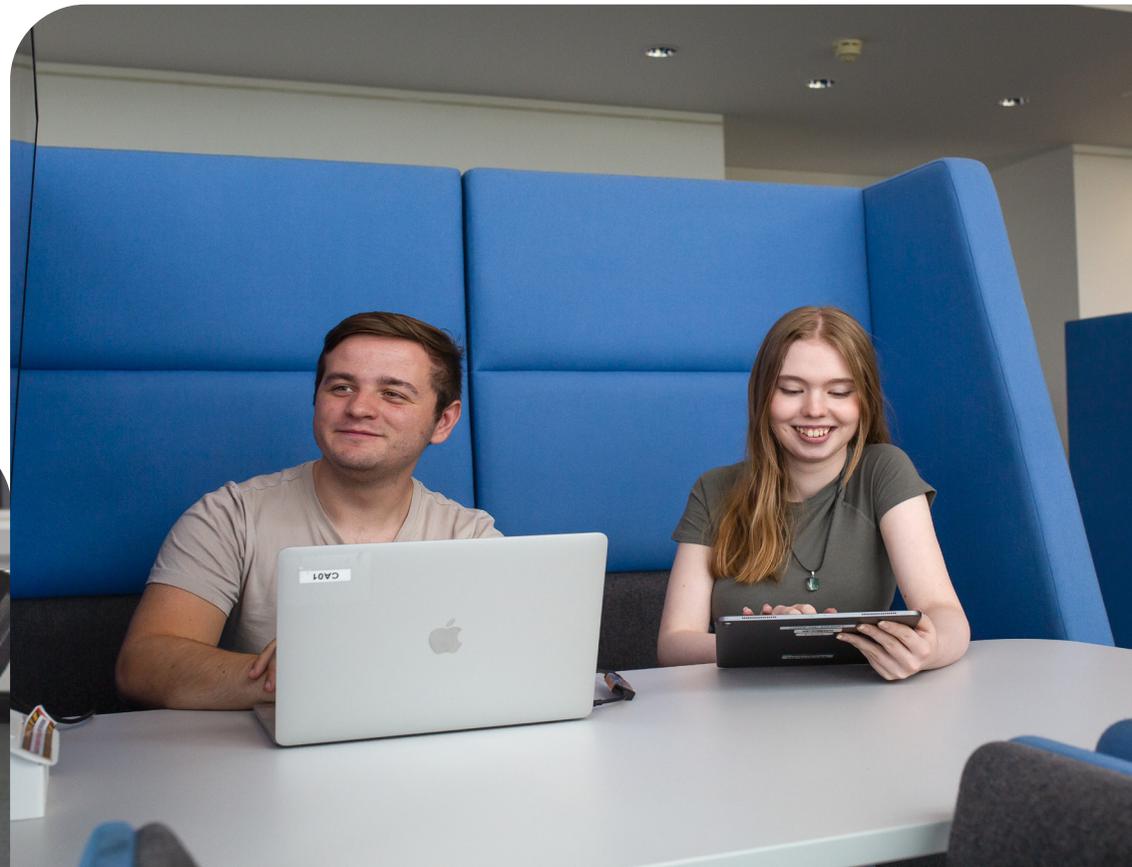
Harnessing Jamf Connect

The university's Apple device estate had previously relied on devices being on-campus for updates to be rolled out and policy changes to be enforced. However, with staff needing the freedom to work with their devices while away from campus, the university's management strategy needed to change.

As such, Academia helped implement Jamf Connect, providing a single MDM solution that can manage staff devices remotely when taken off premises. Jamf Connect also integrates into the university's existing Azure environment, so Apple devices can be monitored alongside the Windows estate, bringing everything into a single pane of glass for the IT team to simplify their management workflows.

Bolstering the university's cyber security

At the core of the university's cyber security strategy is its Security Operations Centre (SOC), which, amongst other things, works to identify and address potential vulnerabilities in the IT environment. With the help of Academia, the mac estate is now more compliant.

The Impact

An ever-present guide

In addition to more formal services, Academia works closely with the university's IT team to help ensure that all Apple IT projects deliver the best possible results.

Academia's managed IT services also help install new Apple devices, providing fast access to expert resources that ensures the job is done correctly while the university IT team focuses on other initiatives.

Freeing up IT resource

One of the biggest benefits for the university is the time returned for the IT team to focus on transformational projects which had previously been sidelined.

For example, summer Mac refreshes previously required a team of two full-time staff and three part-time employees over the course of the whole summer. Now, it only requires two employees to devote a small part of their day to the project, with everything else handled by Academia.

What Next?

Moving forward, the university plans to continue working with Academia on the mac estate to drive forward their IT experience, as befits a modern, forward-thinking university.
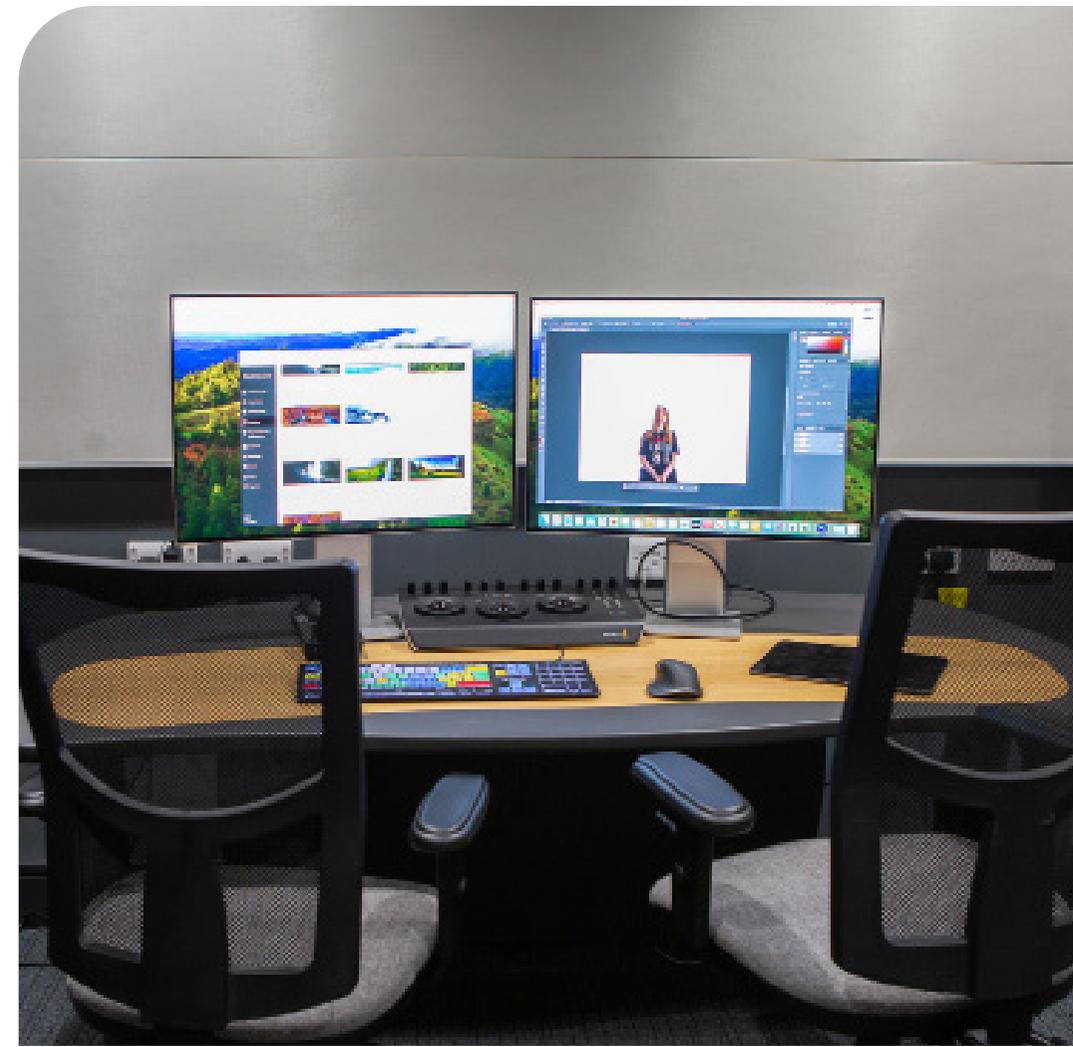
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