

# Leading UK Institution Improves Student Computing Experience and Eradicates File Issues with Windows® Servers in One Fell Swoop



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**Gareth Edwards, Senior Analyst for University of Central Lancashire Learning and Information Services.**

## Challenge:

### Misreading of Mac Files on Windows® Network Servers Results in Repeated Calls to Help Desk, Frustrated Students and IT Staff

According to GroupLogic’s survey of 125 North American colleges and universities in 2010, Mac® use in higher education jumped 18 percent from 2009 to 2010, but supporting the popular Apple® products alongside Windows devices in a cross-platform environment is still a nuisance for many campus technology officials.

Without cross-platform integration solutions helping to make communication and collaboration easier between Windows and Macintosh systems, students and faculty face a host of issues, including accessing printers and files between Windows-based servers and Macs. The problem is not limited to North American campuses: As students and faculty at the UK’s University of Central Lancashire can attest, even an act as simple as re-opening a saved file can be rendered impossible by fundamental differences between Windows and Mac operating systems.

The University of Central Lancashire is one of the largest universities in the UK. Mac support issues on its campus began with the 2009 introduction of a single NetApp Central Storage SAN which allows for single sign-on access to the campus network for over 35,000 students and 3,000 staff from any of the University’s 5,000 computers. There are 400 Apple desktop and laptop computers on the network – less than 10 percent of the computers. However, in 2010, upon upgrading the University’s infrastructure to support Windows 7, that 10 percent began to create support calls to the IT help desk. Mac users, having saved a file using Microsoft® Office for Mac, were no longer able to re-save the file after making edits.

## Key Challenges:

Students and staff using any of the University’s 400 Mac computers could not access saved files on the University network. If a previously saved file was able to be opened, it could not be edited and re-saved without creating a new file.

## Key Benefits:

- After ExtremeZ-IP’s implementation on the campus network, Mac users experienced the same seamless access, editing and saving capabilities as Windows users.
- Calls to the IT help desk from Mac users were virtually eradicated.
- Senior IT staffers were no longer tasked with developing elaborate workarounds.

What seemed a minor irritation grew into a massive problem to those who used a Mac on the University's network. From the beginning, the University's senior IT staff were aware that GroupLogic's ExtremeZ-IP® was an ideal solution—it had been recommended in demonstrations on integrating Macs into Windows-based server environments by Apple staff—but University due diligence standards required IT staff research all possible internal solutions before purchasing outside software. *“We were spending large amounts of time trying to resolve file access and sharing issues for Mac users on our campus,”* said Gareth Edwards, Senior Analyst for University of Central Lancashire Learning and Information Services. *“We probably spent two to four months in personnel hours with a senior team trying to develop a workaround, testing it on new home area servers, and so forth, while our users suffered with the problem.”*

Edwards estimates that 60 percent of Mac-related user calls to the campus IT help desk each day stemmed from problems accessing files shared between Mac computers and the Windows-based server. *“Every time a technical call came in, it took a few minutes to walk the user through a solution, but they would continue to call with the same problem,”* Edwards said.

Due to differences in the way SMB (Windows file sharing) and the way AFP (Apple-native file sharing) save and recognize files, the problems experienced by University of Central Lancashire students and staff are not just common, they are standard on any network—higher education or otherwise—that supports Mac devices on a Windows-based infrastructure.

As the Mac Xserve is phased out while Mac use on campuses continues to grow, such problems are sure to increase without an integration solution in place. GroupLogic's ExtremeZ-IP removes operational roadblocks between Mac devices and Windows-based environments. The solution is designed to deploy instantly and easily, and, once in place on an institution's servers, to operate virtually worry-free, with no maintenance required.

## Organization Background

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) is one of the largest universities in the UK with a staff and student population of over 38,000. The University contributes in the region of £300m to North West England's regional economy, and in the latest Research Assessment Exercise, a rigorous review of research activity in higher education institutions in the UK, the University was rated as having produced research of international excellence in 17 subject areas, 11 of which were assessed as containing world-leading research.

## Solution:

### GroupLogic's ExtremeZ-IP

After seeking and testing out all workarounds possible, consulting outside IT professionals, and extensively reviewing IT forums about Mac and Windows integration, in October 2010, University of Central Lancashire's IT staff determined that there was only one solution: GroupLogic's ExtremeZ-IP.

*“For a significant problem, it was a simple solution,”* said Edwards. Like most educational institutions, the University of Central Lancashire's IT team must closely consider the long-term benefits of any purchase: *“We would have gone to GroupLogic right away, but we have to ensure we're spending money on the right solution—we can't just spend money to solve a problem,”* he adds.

In November 2010, the University purchased a licensed subscription to ExtremeZ-IP to cover all 400 Macs in use on campus. ExtremeZ-IP was deployed to 18 Windows file servers. The installation of the software was straight-forward and, after implementation of local configuration specifics, the installation was complete.

Once the Mac clients were reconfigured to use AFP, the help desk volume decreased, as Mac users no longer experienced any problems opening, accessing, sharing or saving files. *“Our server guys simply have to make sure it's up and running along with our other programs when they restart a server,”* said Edwards. *“The users are oblivious to its presence—their experience works as it should and that's all that matters.”*

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