

## Sidmouth College

Sidmouth College is a Comprehensive Community College located in the southwest of the UK. The school has some 820 students in years 7 through 13, and around 120 staff. As a school with a specialist Technology status, they have recently introduced a number of new courses, including Media Studies.

### The challenge

The school's IT department uses a SAN (Storage Area Network) to store students' work. These are high-performance but relatively expensive units which store upwards of 5Tb of data each. Students are granted network space on the basis of their year and subjects, with Media students receiving an allowance of up to 11Gb. Most students receive 2.5Gb and staff 6Gb.

As available space was starting to run low, Network Manager Peter Bond was forced to seek a solution to provide extra capacity. 'Around 90 percent of the problem files were Microsoft Office documents – a mixture of 2010 and 2013 formats. Media students tend to create quite large files – lots of images just dropped into them without regards for best practices. Documents of 60 or 70Mb aren't unusual.'

Budgetary constraints and the high cost of new SAN SAS disks meant that purchasing additional units was not really an option. Besides this, adding further drives would be a complex process requiring a certain amount of downtime.

### Searching for a solution

Peter was unwilling to use compression software to shrink students' files. 'It can be a little unreliable – some files occasionally get corrupted, and I couldn't afford that. And I didn't want to change the file formats. I needed a nice, easy solution that just worked.'

Peter heard about NXPowerLite file reduction technology from visiting the NXPowerLite stand at the BETT show. In order to satisfy himself about the reduction performance and integrity of the file after processing he tested it on a sample set of files using the Desktop version. 'I didn't see any other products like it – there's not much else on the market. I was quite concerned that students' files would be affected, so I tried it out on one folder to begin with. It cut the file sizes tremendously – something like 50 percent. I tried putting together similar files myself using best practices, and couldn't match that or even come near.'

Peter ordered the File Server version and, after carrying out a full back up, optimised all of the users' data. 'There weren't any problems. I just set it going and left it and it carried on in the background.'



“I’m very pleased. It’s a low-priced product that actually does the job. It’s saved us a lot of money. I would certainly recommend it to my colleagues; we’re all in the same boat and few colleges have much of a budget.”

Peter Bond, Network Manager for Sidmouth College

## The result

Running the software had a huge impact on the network’s available space. ‘Those files of 60-plus Mb are now down to single figures.’

Moreover, he didn’t tell the students what he was doing. ‘I didn’t want users to know what was going on – this shouldn’t be affecting them in any way. In the event, the only feedback I received from users was “Why do I suddenly have much more space?!”’

As well as freeing up around half of the overall capacity of the SAN, there were secondary benefits in terms of reduced backup times. ‘I would replicate the network and then take a backup. It would take around two days to backup the full data – now it’s possible to do it overnight. So there’s a cascading effect.’ Full backups can be taken more frequently. ‘We used to rely on deltas much more. We still use them, but we don’t need to rely on them as much.’

Additionally, the network is much faster now that replication can be carried out solely when students aren’t using it. ‘Replication is fairly demanding on the network, so now that we can do it out of hours there’s a lot less traffic when users are here.’

## Cascading Benefits

50% SAN capacity reclaimed	Avoided purchasing additional SAN disks, which would have been outside the school’s IT budget.
Backup reduced from 2 days to overnight	Full backups can be taken more frequently. ‘We used to rely on deltas much more... we don’t need to rely on them as much.’
Shorter replication time	‘Replication is fairly demanding on the network, so now that we can do it out of hours there’s a lot less traffic when users are here.’



## Conclusion

Running NXPowerLite has enabled Peter to avoid purchasing additional storage, which would have been outside the school's budget, imposing unwelcome restrictions on the network's users, or using inconvenient solutions like compressing their files. 'I'm very pleased. It's a low-priced product that actually does the job. It's saved us a lot of money. I would certainly recommend it to my colleagues; we're all in the same boat and few colleges have much of a budget.'

Peter now schedules NXPowerLite to run at regular intervals to ensure that space is used as efficiently as possible. 'I don't have to worry about it. It just works, so I leave it alone.'