



Quest® Helps Red Energy Simplify Identity Management and Connect Its Heterogeneous Environment

At the end of 2004, Red Energy decoupled from its former parent company when it was purchased by Snowy Hydro Limited, the Australian company that owns and operates the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme. Today, as a stand-alone retailer, Red Energy provides Victoria, Australia, residents with electricity produced from renewable sources. The company employs a staff of approximately 105 call centre sales and service agents, 60 mobile sales staff and 45 corporate staff.

The Challenge

"When we decoupled from our parent company, we spent a lot of time up front on our system architecture to make sure that any future systems we build are done the right way, not haphazardly," said Steve Byrne, enterprise architect in the technology and development department of Red Energy. "This included an identity management strategy that requires all of our systems to integrate with a single repository of account information for any kind of authentication and authorization. Basically we allow one ID per person, regardless of the systems that person needs to access."

If all systems were Windows-based, Active Directory (AD) would have been the company's single repository, but with Red Energy's multi-platform environment, Byrne and his team had to create unified identity management for the Windows infrastructure, along with Unix- and Linux-based systems and Oracle and Java applications.

"Our primary billing and CRM systems are all designed to run on IBM AIX Unix, while Oracle is our strategic database," explained Byrne. "We run Windows for back-office operations and have developed a number of energy-specific Oracle and Java applications. All of our business processes hinge on the Unix systems. So we end up with mission-critical systems on IBM pSeries hardware running AIX 5.3 and RedHat Linux."

With the variety of systems at Red Energy, it was a challenge to meet the single identity per user mandate. AD was chosen as the strategic repository for all of the company's identities, authentication and authorization based on its strong security, simplified management, standards-based authentication and scalability.

One option was building a Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) service through open source tools.

"In this particular case, the open standards approach didn't fit our strategy," said Byrne. "We wanted everything to hinge on our established AD environment. So the solution had to follow our strategy while at an operational level address the problems of users confusing different passwords and accounts between Windows and Unix. It also had to address all the logistical challenges that come with that."

The Quest Solution

Byrne had heard of a Quest Software product called Vintela® Authentication Services. "I saw the product in action at a few conferences and knew that it would meet our needs," said Byrne. "So it was just a matter of getting it into Red Energy for a trial. And because it wasn't a supported configuration for IBM NZ, we also needed to clear our approach with them before proceeding with the project."

Vintela Authentication Services allows non-Windows systems and applications to function fully in AD. Fundamentally, the product achieves exactly what Red Energy was after: a single identity in a single directory for all Windows, Unix and Linux systems. When combining Vintela Authentication Services with Java application authentication from AD through the Vintela® Single Sign-on for Java product, Quest was able to provide coverage for Red Energy's entire range of platforms and applications.

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– Steve Byrne
Enterprise Architect,
Technology and Development
Red Energy



Overview

Headquarters

Melbourne, Australia

Services

Energy

Critical Needs

A single identity, directory and authentication/authorization mechanism for an enterprise consisting of Windows, Unix, Linux and Java systems.

Solution

Vintela Authentication Services
Vintela Single Sign-on for Java
Quest Password Manager

Results

- Provided AD authentication for Unix, Linux and Java systems
- Eliminated the need to outsource password resets
- Offloaded application provisioning from expensive development staff to AD management staff

“Obviously the main criterion in our evaluation was support for our environment—AIX, Linux and potentially ESX and Oracle,” said Byrne. “We wanted to make things simpler and de-provision users across our multiple systems. We also wanted to extend some of the benefits of AD, such as stronger passwords and group policy, into the Unix world, which wasn’t particularly secure on its own.”

The fact that Quest’s solution was very quick and easy to deploy showed Byrne that it was a legitimate option. In addition to strategic identity integration between AD and non-Windows systems and applications, Red Energy also wanted to address the tactical challenge of relying on the help desk to handle password resets. Once again, Byrne turned to Quest and selected Password Manager. “Password Manager was affordable, simple and quick to implement,” said Byrne.

Quest Password Manager provides a Web-based self-service password reset capability for end users. Rather than call the help desk every time they forget their password, Red Energy’s employees can simply access the company’s Password Manager Web page, answer security qualification questions and reset their own passwords. And because each employee has just one identity in AD for all systems, the single password reset works for Windows, Unix, Linux and Java.

“We looked at other solutions for the identity integration platform, but really nothing else was even close,” Byrne explained. “Another big factor is that Quest has a local Australian presence and pre-sales support that the competitor couldn’t match. It really came down to trusting our entire identity management strategy to a stable, worldwide company like Quest or a small start-up that may not be able to serve us into the future.”

The Bottom Line

“With our single-identity strategy, we expected to avoid many of the problems we experienced as part of the larger company,” said Byrne. “The Quest solution certainly delivered. And we don’t have a before-and-after comparison, because we did it right the first time. The initial implementation was very easy; both Vintela Authentication Services and Vintela Single Sign-on for Java worked from day one.”

While Red Energy’s high-level identity management strategy drove the purchase of Quest’s identity integration solutions and Password Manager, many of the drivers to adopt the strategy were purely tactical and cut directly into the company’s bottom line.

“Our Java developers were doing provisioning of users for our applications—that’s a pretty expensive way to do basic management,” said Byrne. “We have up to 10-percent employee turnover every month so provisioning is going on all the time. But that’s not the type of thing we want our developers doing. In that regard Quest’s solution was brilliant. Now we simply provision or de-provision a user in AD and that one transaction covers the Java applications as well, not to mention the Unix and Linux systems.”

In addition to the advantage of a single identity in AD, Red Energy’s strategy also provided an identity management benefit. With all identity information stored in AD, features such as roles, groups and group policy can easily extend to non-Windows platforms and applications. “We built some very specific groups and roles for our call centre staff,” commented Byrne. “All we need to do is add or remove a user from the nested group and rights are automatically granted or revoked.”

Prior to implementing Vintela Authentication Services and Password Manager, Red Energy was paying for user provisioning and all Unix password resets. “Without the need to outsource password resets, we were able to ultimately save quite a bit of money,” said Byrne. “Password Manager provided immediate benefit and a great ROI for Unix and Windows.”

Looking to the future, Red Energy is planning to use Group Policy through Vintela Authentication Services to protect services on the AIX systems based on AD group membership. The company is also looking to implement an automated provisioning system—also available from Quest—to allow AD to act as an account repository for HR information. Ultimately, Byrne would like the HR department to manage groups of staff and thus rights, authentication and access via a single, automated interface.

“For anyone looking to do identity management the right way, I would recommend they consider Quest Software,” said Byrne. “Quest offers a great set of products that work quite nicely together.”



About Red Energy

Red Energy is 100 percent owned by Snowy Hydro Limited, the Australian-owned company that generates renewable peak energy and provides other energy-related products. Snowy Hydro Limited is a large and financially strong corporation that operates nine power stations, oversees 16 dams and reservoirs, employs over 400 people and has over \$3 billion in assets in Australia.

About Quest Software, Inc.

Quest Software, Inc. delivers innovative products that help organizations get more performance and productivity from their applications, databases and Windows infrastructure. Through a deep expertise in IT operations and a continued focus on what works best, Quest helps more than 50,000 customers worldwide meet higher expectations for enterprise IT. Quest Software can be found in offices around the globe and at www.quest.com.