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Robert Mika  
Manager of IT Support Services  
Las Vegas Valley Water District

## The Las Vegas Valley Water District Saves Time, Money and Stress with Computrace

### Summary

The Las Vegas Valley Water District (the District) is a not-for-profit agency that has been providing water to the Las Vegas Valley since 1954. Serving over 1 million Southern Nevada residents, the District strives to supply reliable, quality water, to ensure the sustainability of their desert community, and to serve customers responsibly. Fourteen hundred full-time employees, along with over 500 temporary and contractor staff, work toward these goals.

With the organization's laptop population exceeding 1000 machines and a substantial portion of these operating in the field, the District's IT team was challenged with laptop theft, the inability to efficiently recover stolen laptops, and the corresponding data security risks. Computrace® by Absolute® Software was selected to help overcome these challenges and was quick to prove its capabilities as a theft recovery and data protection tool. The District has since recovered a number of missing laptops, and prevented potential data breaches by remotely deleting data from compromised machines. Much time and headaches have been saved as a result. More recently, IT has also begun to uncover Computrace inventory management and reporting capabilities, and looks forward to additional time, cost and stress savings.

### One Theft Is All It Takes

Previously, the yearly theft of one or two laptops was a fact that the District had come to accept; however, this loss could no longer be ignored when, in early 2007, an unfortunate incident brought the issue of security to the forefront. In an overnight burglary, thieves broke into the District's office and made away with six laptops. The loss of a substantial number of computers, along with risk of a data breach and its financial, regulatory, and reputational consequences, made the necessity of a high tech security solution apparent. "As the victim of computer theft, not only do you have to absorb the financial impact of stolen assets, but you are also forced to accept the risk of data security. When your machines are stolen, and you have potentially sensitive company information walking around out there, you come to realize how vulnerable you are," explained Robert Mika, the District's Manager of IT Support Services. "We knew that we simply did not have the capabilities to protect these laptops nor what they contained – so we turned to Absolute Software for help."

### Everyday Theft Risks

Theft is a principal challenge that the District faces, particularly as up to 700 of the organization's laptops can be found in the field. Although company policy advises workers against leaving laptops in unattended vehicles, the nature of field work is often conducive to them doing so.

Presenting the potential for additional loss, the organization hires a number of temporary and contract workers who will often leave the company on limited notice. The possibility of these individuals walking off with issued laptops is of concern.

Intensifying the need for a theft recovery tool, Mr. Mika expects that the current downward state of the economy could translate into a sharp rise in laptop theft and disappearance. "Now more than ever, the protection of our IT assets is paramount," he notes, "so it is great to have Computrace as part of our security strategy."

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## \$202 USD

The Ponemon Institute reported that, in 2008, the average cost per lost customer record was \$202 USD\*

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### Computrace Recovers Laptops, Saving Time and Money

Since installing Computrace, the District has experienced substantial time savings. Prior to the installation of Computrace, the recovery of stolen machines was a lengthy process and rarely successful. With little evidence to work with, authorities spent countless hours trying to identify possible leads. The District was forced to spend much time with the local police department attempting to piece together facts, sometimes waiting months for recovery, often never seeing the computer again.

With Computrace, Mr. Mika is able to report theft in a matter of minutes and leave the rest to the Absolute Theft Recovery Team. Expediting the recovery process, Computrace sends a silent signal over the Internet to the Absolute Monitoring Center, allowing the Absolute Theft Recovery Team to forensically mine the computer using a variety of procedures including key captures, registry scanning, file scanning, geolocation, and other investigative techniques to determine who has the computer and how it is being used. The team then provides this information to authorities, so they have the evidence necessary to obtain subpoenas and search warrants, locate the unauthorized user, and perform the physical recovery. No further involvement is required of Mr. Mika, allowing him to instead focus on the company's daily operations.

Absolute's theft recovery service, which is backed by a \$1000 Service Guarantee<sup>1</sup>, has saved the company thousands in replacement costs, along with the anxieties associated with computer theft. Absolute has successfully recovered a number of the District's stolen laptops within months of reported theft, containing the problem, minimizing future exposure, and quickly returning computers to the workers who need them.

### Computrace as a Theft Deterrent

Because of the high rate of recovery of Computrace equipped machines, coupled with the Absolute Recovery Team's ability to accurately identify unauthorized users, Mr. Mika has found Computrace to be a useful theft deterrent – particularly for potential internal thieves. "Computrace makes people aware that, if you want to walk out with our laptops, we are going to find you," Mr. Mika states. "It takes the fun out of theft – it's definitely a prevention tool."

### Theft Poses Threats to Data Security

Theft is an ongoing threat to the District's data security – a second, fundamental challenge that the District faces. With employees servicing areas that span Southern Nevada, the field worker's laptops – along with the company data files that they contain – are exposed to numerous, potentially compromising situations on a daily basis.

In addition, the possibility of former employees failing to return District laptops means that potentially sensitive information is in the hands of those who no longer have interests in the company. This instance is of particular concern when the employee leaves the organization disgruntled, and thus with the potential for intent to harm. As such, the Computrace Data Delete feature was a welcomed security solution.

### Computrace Protects Sensitive Data

Using the Data Delete feature, the District is able to remotely delete licenses and information from compromised computers, permanently removing data at the file, directory and operating system level. Mr. Mika has deployed this feature numerous times, not only when computer theft is reported or when a laptop drifts for an extended period, but also after former employees have

<sup>1</sup> Available with Computrace Complete. For Service Guarantee details please refer to [http://www.absolute.com/service\\_agreement.pdf](http://www.absolute.com/service_agreement.pdf)  
\*Ponemon Institute, U.S. Costs of a Data Breach, February 2009

failed to return an issued computer. “Often, it’s quicker and easier to avoid a clash with past employees – I just wipe the computer clean of any meaningful information and let them keep the shell,” Mr. Mika explains. “Knowing that I have that kind of control over company data really cuts the stress out of those situations.”

### Satisfaction Through Success

For Mr. Mika, one particular incident serves testament to the effectiveness of Computrace. After a laptop that had been sent to the factory for repair went missing for several weeks and he initiated a Data Delete on the machine. A little while later, he saw that Computrace was soon able to track the computer – to a room down the hall from his office. The delivery company had returned the laptop weeks earlier, though had failed to notify staff. A District employee had since been relentlessly trying to rebuild the machine, though was puzzled as to why the contents would immediately disappear upon each build. Mr. Mika still chuckles at how the Data Delete tool undermined the employee’s persistence and remarks, “To see the process work right under your nose, and to see it work so well – that’s very satisfying.”

### Plans for the Future

Looking forward, Mr. Mika has begun to explore Computrace as a comprehensive IT asset management tool. He anticipates that its ability to inventory software and hardware on laptops both on and off the network will be increasingly put to use in coming months, as will the regular usage reports that Computrace provides.

By tracking the usage of each laptop, Mr. Mika notes that Computrace will help to ensure employee compliance with existing policies; for example, Computrace can identify those computers that have failed to touch base with IT for the required, monthly, company-wide updates, and ensure that the employees check in. He also predicts that the usage reports, which provide visibility into the software and hardware configuration of each laptop, will help to shape future policy and compliance standards. Ultimately, Mr. Mika knows that “Computrace IT management capabilities will save the IT team invaluable amounts of time and stress.”

### About Absolute Computrace

Absolute Computrace by Absolute Software allows organizations to centrally track and secure their IT assets within a single cloud-based console – the Absolute Customer Center. They can easily identify computers and ultra-portable devices that have gone missing, enforce software policies, and maintain a fleet of optimally running devices. Most importantly, they can remotely invoke preemptive or reactive security measures to safeguard each device and the data it contains.

### About Absolute Software

Absolute Software is the global leader in firmware-embedded persistent endpoint security and management solutions.

We provide organizations with comprehensive visibility and control over all of their endpoints – regardless of user or location. Our customers are able to optimize productivity, reduce operating costs, prove compliance, and remotely secure all of their devices and the corporate data they contain.



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