



UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

The new JANET Certificate Service (<http://www.ja.net/services/jcs/>) replaces the previous Server Certificate Service. Certificates under the new service are now issued via Comodo CA. Certificates are applied for and administered via a new automated web-based system that also provides subscriber organisations with greater control and better visibility of the certificates issued.

BACKGROUND

The University of Strathclyde (www.strath.ac.uk) has around 15,000 undergraduates and 10,000 postgraduates, plus 3600 members of staff. While the university covers a broad range of subjects including Business, Education, Law, Arts and the Social Sciences, its vision is to become a leading international technological university.

USES OF CERTIFICATES

The university has been using server certificates for several years, says Computing Officer Jethro Binks, with over 100 certificates issued over that period from various suppliers that include the old JANET Server Certificate Service, ipsCA, Entrust and Thawte. Mostly these are used to protect communications with web servers, including those for major corporate services such as Outlook Web Access, VLE and other portals. One reason for the use of additional commercial suppliers was the requirement to obtain certificates with Subject Alternative Name attributes, i.e. certificates that allow multiple host names to be protected with a single SSL certificate, which could not easily be provisioned through the GlobalSign agreement underpinning the original JANET Server Certificate Service.

BENEFITS

Strathclyde now uses the new JANET Certificate Service and Jethro is clear on an immediate benefit: the service is much more streamlined and easy to use.

'I don't have to fight with faxes anymore! Previously, applying for a certificate could take up to a week: get the request in the system, get it back, print it off, sign it, fax it back to JANET, wait for them to process it and finally get the email. With the online web interface, now it is sorted within a day in most cases – a vast improvement. I can input the request, leave it for a few minutes while I do something else, go back and download the certificate, and send it off to the requesting user. Done.'

An additional technical benefit, he says, is that previously 'we couldn't submit some Certificate Signing Requests that were generated on certain Windows servers – they wouldn't be accepted because of the way they were encoded, and GlobalSign were reluctant to tackle this. This now works fine, which helps us a lot.'

Network Manager Bruce Rodger agrees that the process is simpler and faster with less bureaucracy involved. The service is also more flexible and, unlike its predecessor, it fully supports Subject Alternative Name certificates.

- IMPLEMENTATION** Bruce says that Strathclyde was involved in the pilot stage of the new service, so while their experience might not be typical of a new user, 'the development team were very receptive to our suggestions. The process has been refined over the last few weeks and the items we highlighted are now becoming available.' Finally, of course, because JANET(UK) procures the service at a favourable rate, 'it doesn't cost us anything!'
- FUTURE USES** Bruce and Jethro say that Strathclyde will continue to use the new JANET Certificate Service mostly for the same kind of purposes as before, such as protecting web servers. Jethro says they may also explore code signing certificates that guarantee code has not been corrupted or altered. Otherwise the intention is to respond to user demand as it arises.

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