



Case Study:
Northwest Evaluation
Association (NWEA)



Northwest Evaluation Association

Supporting academic testing in the educational Mac marketplace has been an ongoing priority at NWEA.

Overview: With the help of CodeWeavers', NWEA was able to solve its needs for an Intel Mac client by deploying its existing Windows client via CrossOver Mac.

The Northwest Evaluation Association is a non-profit organization offering academic testing and evaluation services to school districts across the United States. Based in Lake Oswego, Oregon, NWEA's goal is to work with schools to provide products and services that measure and promote academic student growth and school improvement. These include accurate assessments, timely reporting, practical classroom resources, and ongoing professional development. NWEA currently provides services to more than 10% of the nation's schools, administering some 10 million tests to 4 million schoolchildren each year.

NWEA's current computer-based testing software (TestTaker) is a fat-client application developed in the late 1990s. Given Apple's traditional strength in education, Macs have consistently accounted for almost 20% of NWEA's tests, meaning that supporting the Mac platform has been an ongoing need at NWEA. Consequently, TestTaker was originally created using cross-platform development tools that produced dual binaries and application libraries for PC and Mac.

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However, the unveiling of Apple's Intel-based Macs in 2007 presented NWEA with a problem. Because NWEA's development tools were optimized for PowerPC applications, they had no clear way forward onto the new Intel Mac platforms. Attempts to run TestTaker's PowerPC version under OS X's converters were not propitious. In essence, the PowerPC version was having to perform a double emulation on the new platform—taking PC code, translating it into PowerPC code, and then using Apple's tools to emulate the Motorola code on the Intel Mac. The results were poor performance and many bugs.

Likewise, while NWEA was working on a new web-based client for both its Mac and PC applications, it wasn't going to be deployable in the immediate future. NWEA needed a Mac solution (and rapidly) that would bridge the gap between its

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current TestTaker software and the next generation application it hoped to begin deploying in late 2009.

It was at this stage that one of NWEA’s employees tried running their testing software on CodeWeavers CrossOver Mac software. Initial results just using CrossOver’s demo version were encouraging. After a further evaluation by CodeWeavers in the fall of 2008, it was felt that the work would not be too extensive, and a development services contract was put in place.

A number of technical issues had to be solved, including how to make the application run cleanly in a fullscreen kiosk mode, handling file-locking issues, adding support in Wine for certain sound file formats, and adding assorted graphical ‘spit and polish.’ Karl Boekelheide, NWEA’s, Chief Quality Officer and the project’s executive sponsor noted, “The project had a number of challenges, but the primary problem wasn’t so much getting technical issues fixed as it was replicating errors we’d see on our end for the folks at CodeWeavers. CodeWeavers was very responsive in crushing bugs once they were replicated.” This was important, because the project was working under serious time constraints. The first beta of TestTaker’s CrossOver port was duly deployed in December 2008, followed by a more general distribution in January 2009. Since then, the software has been running successfully in many of NWEA’s client schools. All in all, CodeWeavers was able to deliver a timely solution that allowed NWEA to meet customer needs without breaking the bank or unduly burdening its own internal development team.

For more information on how CodeWeavers can help you bring your Windows application into a new market, contact James Ramey, VP Sales, at sales@codeweavers.com, +1 651-523-9302.