NETSUPPORT SCHOOL, NETSUPPORT SOFTWARE

Reviewer: **Matt Williams, ICT technician**
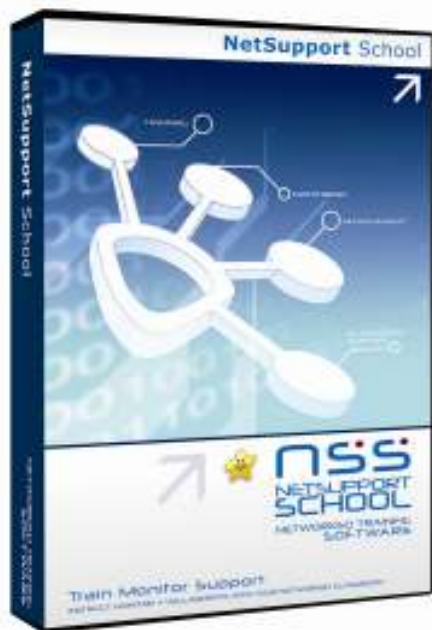
Cost: Classroom pack (25-49 licences) - £28.20 + VAT per licence (updates/support - £5.64 + VAT per licence)

Most people working in a modern IT environment will be familiar with the idea of remote support – you know, where you phone IT Support because you want someone to come and hold your hand and tell you that everything will be alright, but the lazy lard box can't stand to leave his tea and doughnuts even for five minutes, so instead just magically takes over your computer from the comfort of his chair.

Well, NetSupport Software, which has long been a facilitator of tech-support thrombosis, has applied its particular genius to the technical needs of the teacher and, with its NetSupport School 10 package, stands to make hefty inroads into education. NetSupport School 10 is touted as 'networked training software', and the first and most obvious function of the software is the ability to remote into a client and take control of a machine. This is, however, just the tip of a very large iceberg, and a quick scan of the feature list will have even long-in-the-tooth tech-support guys sweaty-palmed and restless: network-wide visual monitoring, application and internet tracking, clipboard and file sharing, hardware and software inventory, desktop messaging, live chat, plus the ability to speak to clients via the speakers on their machines – surely software this complex will be a nightmare to set up?

Not so. The program makes installation and setup so ludicrously easy that it feels like cheating. You need only put the disc in one machine to install the tutor (server) console applications. The console then evaluates your entire network and allows you to deploy to any computer on a network with a click of the mouse. Client settings can be changed from the tutor machine in a similarly monkey-proof fashion and deployed painlessly, in seconds.

The machines on the network can be grouped by any criteria you choose, including manual selection, and set as a class. Each tutor machine can be assigned a starter class – machines that it automatically detects and connects to at start-up so a lesson need never be delayed while you faff around looking for the right buttons to press.

Once connected, you have the ability to take, share or relinquish control, show applications and content – including videos – to one, all, or selected machines; to blank client screens to focus attention on the tutor; and to start and stop services and applications on the fly. Classroom management and computer use monitoring is suddenly made not just possible, but easy, with the ability to see all of the monitor outputs on a class in a single screen – off-task pupils will be instantly recognisable.

And all of this from an interface that even the most technophobic of staff would find obvious and inviting. Documentation is light – one small 'getting started' pamphlet – and, for once, that's ok! Indeed, you could even throw that away, as NSS 10 runs itself. The whole package is polished to a level way beyond the usual tech support/remote desktop offerings, and using it is an exercise in constant eyebrow lifts.

Pricing may be a kick in the pants for a good-sized school - £20.28 per licence for 100 licences plus an optional annual maintenance fee of 20% which provides software updates and unlimited tech-support – but once you see the software in action it's easy to justify the outlay. While it only runs on Windows at the moment I'm informed by the tech-bods at NSS that a Linux version is in the oven, so soon there will be no excuse not to have it.

SUMMARY:
This is the way that software is supposed to work – quickly, easily and well. A joy.

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