Transcript: Demystifying DSS, November 7, 2008

Mary: Hello, my name is Mary. I am a member of the NUIT Communications team, and welcome to today’s NUIT podcast focusing on DSS. I am here today with Mike Satut, the manager of DSS, which standards for Distributed Support Services, and Jay Bagley, the assistant manager of DSS, and we are going to demystify DSS. So Mike, can you tell us what exactly is the mission of your group?

Mike: Absolutely, and thanks for having us today Mary.

Mary: Thank you.

Mike: The mission of DSS is to provide enterprise quality on desktop support services to staff and faculty working on university home computers.

Mary: OK, sounds simple enough. So, Jay, how do you provide support to faculty and staff? Do they come and knock on your door?

Jay: Nah, actually I work in a cube and Mike’s office doesn’t have a door, so that wouldn’t work. But they can contact DSS in a number of different ways. They can start off by contacting the NUIT Support Center via phone at 847-491-HELP, or they can submit a direct referral to DSS by link. The link is on the NUIT home page. We also provide support via contract support. If you’re interested in that, you can email dss-manager@northwestern.edu, and we also support the university through our UNITS program.

Mary: And I think we’ll get to more about UNITS in a moment. So Mike, what are the benefits of working with your group versus hiring a student from anyone’s department or an outside source like Geek Squad?

Mike: Well I’m glad you asked. I mean, obviously, we have a lot of very bright students here at this university, and the Geek Squad is a good option sometimes for your personal machine. I think where we’re different from students and Geek Squad or other third party party options is that we’re part of the university, we’re part of the central IT group, and what that does is a few things. The first is that we’re very plugged in to what’s happening at the university. We’re very focused on information technology and how we can make things easier for staff and faculty working here. That’s all we do. That’s our primary focus, and we like to think that we’re very good at it, and that’s really as was stated in our mission. And, with the GeekSquad and other groups like that, they can be very smart folks, but they have to re-learn, essentially, every customer. Every time they come to the university, they’re going to have to figure out exactly what’s what, who’s who, where do I go to buy software,
and this is stuff that we train each of our staff members on when they come on board and things that we reiterate through regular meetings and through our education program.

Mary: Very good, very good. So Jay, we mentioned UNITS earlier. Can you tell us a little bit more about what that special club does?

Jay: Yeah. UNITS is actually, it stands for the University Network of Information Technology Specialists. And what it is, it’s a group of all the technology specialists from around the university and every department. It’s an open group, and any person who provides technology support for their department can feel free to join. We operate mostly via listserv, exchanging ideas back and forth, questions about problems that we may have, and we have monthly meetings every third Thursday to discuss topics and projects that we’re all working on that maybe we can share some knowledge amongst each other, and quarterly we have our UNITS meeting where we discuss university technology initiatives. We have vendors come in to give presentations and other presentations about what’s going on around the university with regards to technology.

Mike: Yeah, the only thing I might add to that, Jay, is that the quarterly meetings, those are really more of a formal presentation. We bring in vendors, as Jay mentioned, and other experts, internal to IT and also part of the distributed IT groups, to talk specifically on areas that we think are of interest. The third Thursdays, on the other hand, are much more of an informal opportunity for folks to get together and engage in more of a dialogue and in the collaboration because, while we definitely feel like we’re experts in some things, there are experts in all sorts of other areas, and we’d really encourage people to come to these third Thursday meetings so that we can share our knowledge and expertise and hopefully if we’re facing some of the same problems, come up with some common solutions to those problems.

Mary: So how do I sign up to become a member of UNITS?

Mike: Well for UNITS, all you really need to do is send an email to dss-manager@northwestern.edu. That goes to both me and Jay. We’ll get you signed up for UNITS and make sure that we introduce ourselves and make you aware of any upcoming events that we have, and then once you’re on the list, really all you gotta do is pay attention and we’ll send out reminders. For third Thursday we send out a reminder at least a week before, and for the quarterly ones, we try to get out a reminder a month in advance; that way you can get it on your schedule, because third Thursday is only an hour, typically an hour and a half. The UNITS quarterly meetings can be anywhere from two to three hours, or even longer for our once-a-year forum event.

Mary: OK, great! Well I can personally attest to the excellent service that you and your team provide because our desktop support person is a part of DSS. So with that, I want to thank you, Mike and Jay, for your time today. We really appreciate hearing more about DSS.
Mike: Thank you for having us.

Jay: Yeah absolutely, it's been a pleasure.

Mary: Thank you.

This has been a presentation from the Northwestern University Information Technology Support Center. Please e-mail future topic suggestions to NUIT Communications at it-communications@northwestern.edu.

- NUIT to Go! Podcasts Archive
- NUIT Home