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# York University and AppsAnywhere: A Story of Strategic IT, Resilience, and Doing More With Less

York University is Canada's third-largest university with over 50,000 students and 3,000 staff across multiple campuses, including a main campus, a bilingual campus (Glendon), a new Markham campus (opened September 2024, over 4,000 students), and a future School of Medicine campus opening in 2028. With a federated IT model spanning multiple campuses, delivering software efficiently and securely was a challenge. Their primary application delivery before AppsAnywhere, while serving its purpose, was not user-friendly and required a lot of management and headaches.

## Snapshot

**Client:** York University

**Location:** Toronto, Canada

**Total Students:** 50,000+

**Total Staff:** 3,000+

**AppsAnywhere Customer Since:** 2017

An AppsAnywhere customer since 2017, York University shared their experience, journey and learnings with the AppsAnywhere community at the Canada SUMMIT in May 2025. A candid and honest presentation by Oliver Chan Kong, Manager Workgroup Technology Services UIT, summarized below.

## How it started...

When the Citrix contract came up for renewal back in 2017, York University was faced with a challenge and opportunity at the same time. The opportunity was to become more innovative, and replace the large and cumbersome setup they had, for which they had to pay more with a new contract. On the flip side, the challenge was to find an application delivery solution that could perform better, cheaper and more efficiently.

After discovering AppsAnywhere during a user day, York's central IT team (UIT) saw a chance to shift toward a more flexible, cost-effective model. Following a successful year-long proof of concept, they made the switch.

The move wasn't rushed. York's team intentionally "beat up" the platform, testing it heavily with both students and the administrative community for many use cases and scenarios. The platform passed with flying colors, and leadership supported the change.

## Laying the foundation

Switching to AppsAnywhere was an "easy call", but York knew that long term success depended on bringing faculty IT teams on board from the beginning. The central team, responsible for guiding technology strategy across faculties, paid for mandatory AppsAnywhere training, requiring every faculty to send two representatives.

This created a distributed packaging model:

• Faculty IT teams package and validate their own apps

• Central IT provides oversight, publishes validated packages

• Standards are enforced: no early engagement, no validation leads to delayed publication

> "We kept it simple. We followed the AppsAnywhere documentation and didn't reinvent the wheel."

This model allowed York to build a scalable, manageable system, one that gave faculties autonomy while allowing central IT to maintain quality and consistency with a lean team of just five people (one of whom manages AppsAnywhere full-time).

## Immediate payoffs

### Better user experience

The change from Citrix's clunky interface to AppsAnywhere was instantly noticeable to end users. The platform was faster, easier to use, and worked across student devices and university-owned hardware alike.

### Rapid response to COVID

When the pandemic hit in 2020, AppsAnywhere proved vital. York's central IT team pivoted to software packaging, and in just a couple of weeks, remote access to university applications was fully operational.

> "AppsAnywhere helped us transition everything remotely. There was no impact on our ability to deliver applications."

### Cyberattack recovery

In May 2020, York was hit by a major cybersecurity attack that took core systems offline. AppsAnywhere became a lifeline during recovery.

> "AppsAnywhere saved our bacon again. It was one of the first services we brought back online after third-party checks. It gave us access to data and applications. It was as if nothing happened.
>
> I wouldn't wish that on anyone. It was a nightmare. But AppsAnywhere has been solid ever since."

York also conducts annual penetration testing across all environments, and AppsAnywhere has never been flagged, a testament to its strong security posture.

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# How it's going

## Growing value in a tougher environment

Fast forward to today, and Canadian higher education is facing even tougher challenges. International student numbers are down, domestic enrolments have declined, and financial pressures are forcing institutions to reduce staff, restructure programs, and streamline operations.

For York UIT, that reality means fewer resources, more responsibility, with added expectations for high-quality digital services and new technology adoption.

That's where AppsAnywhere continues to deliver.

## Doing more with less

York's small, nimble central IT team is still just five people. But with the distributed IT model established in 2017, they're supporting a growing, complex university environment, including:

• A new campus in Markham (opened with 4,000 students)

• An expanding bilingual Glendon campus

• A future School of Medicine opening in 2028

And they're doing it across nearly 141,000 Windows devices and 18,000 macOS machines, according to 2024–25 usage data—more than double the device volume from two years prior.

> "We're still a small team, but AppsAnywhere gives us scale. We're able to manage this massive footprint because the faculties are trained, empowered, and accountable."

AppsAnywhere's packaging recipes and on-demand packaging services have also helped York manage workload spikes during key academic terms despite staffing shortages.

## Cost savings where they matter most

AppsAnywhere's analytics platform revealed that faculties were unknowingly buying duplicate software licenses. Now, thanks to shared insights there's better collaboration and efficiency:

• Faculties communicate and coordinate purchases

• Redundant licenses have been cut

• A pooled licensing model has been adopted for many key apps

> "Faculties now talk to each other and make more senseful decisions. That's saved us a huge amount of money."

York's budget strategy is now heavily influenced by AppsAnywhere's usage insights, helping them justify renewals, prioritize shared tools, and reduce waste.

**Smarter infrastructure, better student experience**

York has begun closing large physical computer labs. Instead, they've deployed simple hallway kiosks that run a vanilla OS plus AppsAnywhere. These machines are easier to manage, cheaper to maintain, and provide students with fast, reliable access to apps wherever they are on campus.

They've also introduced OS releases as a service, all managed through AppsAnywhere for consistency and speed.

The university's student experience strategy now leans heavily on:

• Software-as-a-Service delivery

• No virtual desktops for teaching tools

• Integration with LMS platforms

*"The kiosk model is working really well. It's easy to deploy, quick to service, and gives students what they need."*

**Security, standards and governance**

In the current climate of growing cyber threats and tighter audit controls, York is placing more emphasis on:

• MFA (multi-factor authentication)

• CIS controls and endpoint patching

• SIEM and security event monitoring

AppsAnywhere continues to pass penetration tests and integrates into York's wider governance model without friction.

**Strategic planning for the future**

While York is exploring Azure Virtual Desktop and evaluating cloud offerings, including AppsAnywhere's cloud platform, they're in no rush for more fundamental changes. Their current on-prem model is working well, and any move to the cloud will be strategic and measured.

*"We're not quite ready to jump to the cloud ship, but we're preparing and comparing options."*

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# Built for now and what's next

York University's story is one of strategic thinking, practical implementation, and long-term value. What started as a replacement for a clunky legacy system has grown into a core part of how the university delivers software, empowers its staff, supports its students, and recovers from crises.

AppsAnywhere wasn't just the right tool for 2017, it's the right tool for 2025 and beyond.

> "AppsAnywhere has been super reliable. It just works. In a time when we've had to cut, reorganize, and adapt, it's been solid."

What's your story? Where are your challenges and opportunities? Get in touch with your friendly and knowledgeable advisors, we'd love to help!

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**www.appsanywhere.com**

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