

Hype Cycles, VDI, and BYOD



Don MacVittie, 2012-25-07

Survive the hype. Get real benefits. #F5 #BYOD #VDI

An interesting thing is occurring in the spaces of Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) that is subtle, and while not generally part of the technology hype cycle, seems to be an adjunct of it in these two very specific cases. In espionage, when launching a misinformation campaign, several different avenues are approached for maximum impact, and to increase believability. While I don't think this over-hype cycle is anything like an espionage campaign, the similarities that do exist are intriguing.

The standard hype cycle tells you how a product category will change the world, we've seen it over and over in different forms. Get X or get behind your competitors, Product Y will solve all your business problems and cook you toast in the morning. More revolutionary than water, product Z is the next big thing. Product A will eliminate the need for (insert critical IT function here)... The hype cycle goes on, and eventually wears out as people find *actual* uses for the product category, and the limitations. At that point, the product type settles into the enterprise, or into obscurity.

This is all happening with both VDI and BYOD.

VDI will reduce your expenses while making employees happier and licensing easier... Well, that was the hype. We've discovered as an industry that neither of these hype points was true, and realized that the anecdotal evidence was there from the early days. That means it is useful for reducing hardware expenses, but even that claim is being called into question by those who have implemented and paid for servers *and* some form of client. There are very valid reasons for VDI, but it is still early yet from a mass-adoption standpoint, and enterprises seem to acknowledge it needs some time. Still, the hype engine declares each new year "The Year of VDI". Server virtualization shows that there won't be a year of VDI when its time comes, but rather a string of very successful years that slowly add up.

Meanwhile, BYOD is everything for everyone. Employees get the convenience of using the device of their choice, employers get to reduce expenses on mobile devices, the sun comes out, birds sing beautiful madrigals... Except that like every hype cycle ever, that's nowhere near the reality. Try this one on for size to see what I'm talking about:



What you'll need

- We're thrilled to have you at ZapNGo!
- Before your first full day, you will need:
 - Cell Phone (provide number to HR)
 - Tablet PC (provide MAC to IT)
 - Proof of eligibility to work in the US (to HR)
 - Signed non-disclosure agreement (to HR)
- Failure to provide these items will result in early termination.

ZapNGo New Employee Packet, Page 2

If you're not familiar with my example corporation ZapNGo, see my [Load Balancing For Developers series of blogs](#)

Because that is never going to happen.

Which means it is not “bring your own device”, it is “let us buy the device you like” which will also not last forever unless there is management convergence. In the desktop space, organizations standardized on Windows because it allowed them to care for their gear without having to have intimate knowledge of three (or ten) different operating systems. There is no evidence that corporations are going to willy-nilly support different device OS’s and the associated different apps that go along with using multiple device OS’s. In many industries, the need to control the device at a greater level than most users want their personal devices messed with (health care and financial services spring to mind) will drive a dedicated device for work, like it or not.

So why is there so much howling about “the democratization of IT”? Simple, the people howling for BYOD belong to two groups. C-Level execs that need access 24x7 if an emergency occurs, and people like me – techno geeks that want to pop onto work systems from their home tablet. The other 90% of the working population? They do not want work stuff on their personal tablet or phone. They just don’t. They’ll take a free tablet from their employer and even occasionally use it for work, but even that is asking much of a large percentage of workers.

Am I saying BYOD is bogus? No. But bear with me while I circle back to VDI for a moment...

In the VDI space, there was originally a subtle pressure to do massive implementations. We’ve had decades of experience as an industry at this point, and we know better than to do massive rip-n-replace projects unless we have to. They just never go as planned, they’re too big. So most organizations have the standard pilot/limited implementation/growing implementation cycle. And that makes sense, even if it doesn’t make VDI vendors too happy. In the interim, if you discover something that makes a given VDI implementation unsuitable for your needs, you still have time to replace it with a parallel project.

The most cutting-edge (to put it nicely) claims are that your employees – *all of them!* – want access to their desktops on their BYOD device. Let me see, how do you spell that... S L O W. That’s it. Most of your employees don’t want work desktops at work, let alone on their tablet at the beach. It’s just us geeks and the overachievers that even think it’s a good idea, and performance will quickly disillusion even the most starry eyed of those of us who do.

So let’s talk realities. What will we end up with after the hype is done and how can you best proceed? Well, here are some steps you can take. Some of these are repeated from my VDI blog post of a few months ago, but repetition is not a terrible thing, as long as it’s solid advice.

Pick targeted deployments of both.

Determine who most wants/needs BYOD and see if those groups can agree on a platform.

Determine what segments of your employee population are best suited to VDI. Low CPU usage or high volume of software installs are good places to start.

Make certain your infrastructure can take the load and new types of traffic. If not, check the options F5 has to accelerate and optimize your network for both products.

Move slowly. The largest VDI vendors are certainly not going anywhere, and at a minimum, neither are Android and iOS. So take your time and do it right.

SELL your chosen solutions. IT doesn’t generally do very well on the selling front, but if you replace a local OS with a remote one, every performance issue will be your fault unless you point out that no matter where they are geographically, their desktop stays the same, it is easier to replace client hardware when you don’t have to redo the entire desktop, etc.

Gauge progress. Many VDI deployments fell on hard times because they were too ambitious, or because they weren’t ambitious enough and didn’t generate benefits, or because they weren’t properly sold to constituents. BYOD will face similar issues. Get a solid project manager and have them track progress not in terms of devices or virtual desktops, but in terms of user satisfaction and issues that could blow up as the project grows.

That’s it for now. As always, remember that you’re doing what’s best for your organization, do not concern yourself with hype, market, or vendor health, those will take care of themselves.

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