RIP WinXP. Now, To The Future!

Don MacVittie, 2011-01-11

Last week, InformationWeek quoted a Microsoft manager as saying there was "No chance" Windows XP would get another stay of execution. This really shouldn't be a surprise to anyone, it was only the backlash from enterprises that kept Microsoft from ending support for XP over the last several years.

So now that Windows XP support will no longer be available, it is time for even the most recalcitrant enterprises to consider their options. All of their options. The world is changing on us yet again, and the needs of tomorrow might not be the needs of the future. Or even the needs of today.

As always, I'll preface this investigation with *it's your IT department, you know it best. Do what is best for your business.* With that said, now I'll tell you what I think you ought to consider – either now or in the near future.

There is a significant portion of your workforce that would do just as well with a tablet as with a laptop. Yes, I said that. And they know who they are. A simple question "would you give up your laptop if you had a tablet with remote storage?" should quickly clear up who those people are. Of course, you'll have to make certain your applications will run on the tablets, but there are a variety of paths to get you from here to there.

There is another significant portion of your enterprise who would work just fine with Virtual Desktops. Yes, I said that too. Let's face it, not everyone needs a top-of-the-line computer. I know, that's blasphemy after the "PC revolution", but it's true. A huge percentage of your workforce wouldn't even notice if they were working on a VDI infrastructure. There are a few classes of employee that would. Road Warriors with varying connection speeds might chafe at a VDI infrastructure, and some groups like application developers or a variety of engineers (the kind that do huge CAD files), but many in your organization are largely already working off of web apps that go over the network. From a performance perspective, that is not a huge difference from VDI.

And some people – digital artists, CAD/CAM specialists, developers and engineers (as I've mentioned) that have high memory and disk usage, are still going to need desktops.

But if you pair tablets with VDI, then your executives can check up on their current initiatives from their tablet after dinner – without having to go to a computer. If you think that's not such a huge benefit, ask them how much more involved they would be off-hours if it was easier to do. The answer is lots. I'm not an executive, and I check my mail on my phone and tablet almost constantly in off-hours, but almost never go boot up my laptop to do the same. In fact, if I log into my laptop at night, it is because I received a message on one of those other two platforms that I need files on my hard-disk to answer (something VDI with universal clients would resolve, since your "desktop" could appear anywhere).

It is time to start thinking about how to handle your upgrade from Windows XP. And it is time to start considering the needs of your users in the next several years before upgrading. Things are changing, more tools to enable the business are available, and a broadly based upgrade is a good time to look into technologies that enable these tools for the benefit of your organization.

I'm writing this blog on XP, so here's hoping our IT staff is reading my blog :-). Do I want VDI? I don't know, since I'm in Green Bay (or sometimes Cincinnati) and our datacenters are on the West Coast of the US, I'm going to guess that my performance would suffer. But I am one of those users who, when not writing a bit of software to support a blog, could well work off of VDI. It hurt to admit that though. Just a little bit. I'd love to say "I develop all the time, not possible", but I don't. I develop on occasion, and could do it on my home machines if work went VDI. And while you can't generally ask your employees to work on their home machines, you can ask them for an impartial assessment of their needs.

Perhaps a bit of cloud storage, along with VDI would resolve even some of the edge cases – though fair warning, if you're planning on encrypting data in the cloud, you'll need some form of decryption tool that will allow outside-the-network machines to decrypt. Which could be painful. Or even not possible since you're talking multiple encrypt/decrypt locations and a single target store.

Personally, I think it is time for Windows XP to go the way of Windows 3.1 anyway. We are running Windows 7 or a Linux variant on all of our home machines, and yet for work I still have Windows XP. Time to let the ten-year-old go out and play.

And did I mention that F5 has some astoundingly cool VDI support? No? Okay, well that's my marketing bit for the day. We do. And I'd love to try it out when our IT upgrades. Of course I have questions and concerns, but for some of us, that's part of the fun!