

DESKTOP VIRTUALIZATION – MAKING THE CHOICE

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Abstract

Techaisle's recent survey of nearly 300 large enterprises currently using desktop virtualization shows that while the virtualization market remains healthy, it also shows that perhaps customers suffer from some misperceptions about the value and benefits of desktop virtualization. While desktop virtualization should be part of the arsenal, customers should pragmatically evaluate the scenarios where virtualization might have the greatest benefit.

INTRODUCTION

The desktop virtualization juggernaut continues to gather steam as more and more companies choose to use the technology to improve security and for systems management. Large vendors have firmly jumped into the game, numerous Total Cost of Ownership reports have been published and the message from vendors to IT departments is clear – desktop virtualization is the way to securing desktops and reducing costs of management.

In our view, it is a warning sign that perhaps the message around desktop virtualization may have gotten out of hand. Technologies are often designed with specific scenarios in mind but as the market grows a technology often becomes a broad replacement for older traditional technologies. Indeed, it starts becoming a “standard” way of doing things regardless of the actual scenario. The issue is that functionality is typically optimized for a specific set of scenarios. As usage broadens, functional advantages of the new technology over the old may erode and users experience diminished returns.

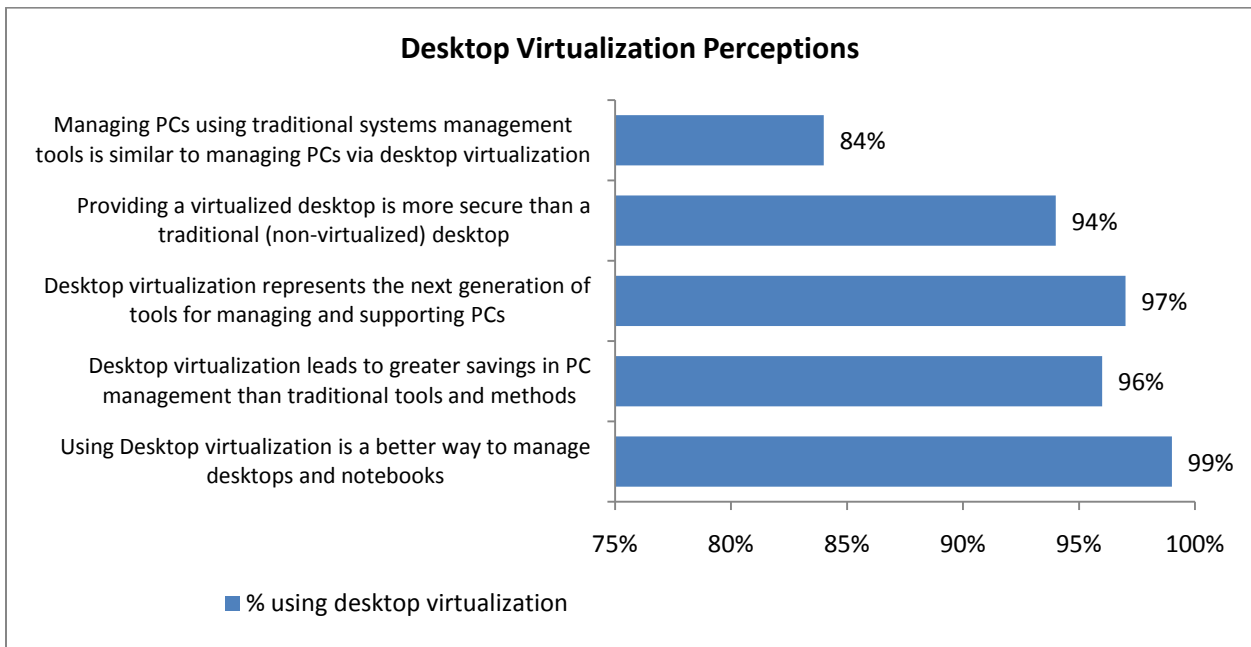
This appears to be happening with desktop virtualization as well – the virtualization mantra is being repeated and chanted around IT departments like gospel and the real question is whether it makes sense to accept desktop virtualization as the universal panacea as pushed by vendors or should IT decision makers take a hard look at traditional systems management technologies and decide where the use of each is appropriate. In a recent survey conducted by Techaisle of over 300 desktop virtualization users, nearly two in five respondents stated that the primary reason for deploying desktop virtualization was to improve security of corporate desktops and 22 percent stated making desktops and notebooks easier to manage as the primary reason. The same survey also highlighted some interesting perceptions surrounding desktop virtualization and its benefits.

MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUND

The majority of IT managers and departments who have deployed desktop virtualization have likely been using traditional systems management tools and techniques prior to deploying virtualization technologies. The survey data indicates however that users are making generalizations regarding virtualization that may not be true in every situation. For example, 99 percent of virtualization users believe that it is a better way to manage PC assets compared to traditional systems management tools and methods and 96 percent believe that virtualization leads to more savings. The strength of these perceptions leads us to believe that there are two primary issues:

1. **The cacophony surrounding desktop virtualization is leading to confusing generalizations:** Marketers would do well to guide customers better in this regard. While the virtualization market has developed, systems management tool vendors have continued to enhance the capabilities of their products. However, these advances are being drowned out by the virtualization message. It would be useful for IT vendors and the channel to provide guidance to customers underscoring when it would or wouldn't be useful to deploy virtualization.

- Customers risk slipping down the slope of the diminishing curve unless a more pragmatic approach is considered:** Given the strength of these perceptions among desktop virtualization users, it is very likely that some of these users are experiencing sub-optimal returns on their investment. Take into consideration the typical customer of an IT department – the Information Worker. A recent study conducted by Microsoft comparing PC management costs using traditional systems management techniques versus desktop virtualization found that in the case of PCs used by Information Workers, using traditional tools and methodologies would likely lead to lower total costs of ownership relative to desktop virtualization. The primary reason was that while desktop virtualization lowers costs if rich clients are replaced with thin clients and therefore eliminate physical visits to the desktop it also injects new costs resulting from implementing and managing a sophisticated virtualization infrastructure. Indeed, the study found the costs to be approximately 11 percent higher if virtualization was deployed.



What these findings essentially suggest is that the deployment of virtualization be made considering specific usage scenarios rather than a generic solution to reducing desktop management costs.

DEFINING THE SCENARIOS

There are a number of considerations when looking at defining scenarios where virtualization may be a good fit:

1. The type of work being conducted
2. The nature of the information being consumed/created
3. The primary tasks of the user
4. The need for mobility and ad-hoc connectivity

5. Regulatory requirements

Of these, we believe the first three to be most important largely because they apply to nearly all companies regardless of size or industry. The last point – regulatory requirements – apply to specific sensitive industries (such as national security) that providing virtual desktops may be the only choice.

The first three points – the type of work being conducted, the nature of information and primary tasks are tightly intertwined with each other. Workers whose task primarily relate to creating, manipulating and acting on information – so called “Information Workers” benefit the most from rich clients. Business or Enterprise PCs are typically designed to support Information Workers given that they form a large part of the workforce. These workers demand a highly responsive IT infrastructure and place value of reliability and performance. IT departments looking to provide the same experience via a virtualized environment are likely taking on a task that will strain the existing infrastructure. Upgrading the infrastructure will very likely reduce or erase any cost savings. Under such conditions, full featured PCs are a better choice.

Other scenarios however favor deploying desktop virtualization as a way to reducing systems management costs. For example

1. Where the need for rich clients is reduced because of simpler content authoring needs
2. Where it makes sense to maintain a single instance of the application that is shared by many (for security purposes)
3. Scenarios where offline access is not a key requirement or there is a specific application that is the sole basis for the primary task (e.g. – managing a calendar, setting appointments)

RICH CLIENT SUPPORT AND MANAGEMENT

An obvious question then is that for scenarios where rich clients are being used in a non-virtualized environment, are there technologies that provide a similar level of control for managing PCs? Indeed such solutions are available from both Microsoft and Intel. Microsoft’s Systems Center is a mature product that has been consistently enhanced over the years. The latest enhancement includes System Center Service Manager 2010, a new addition to the System Center suite of products, delivering an integrated platform for automating and adapting IT Service Management. Pre-built processes based on industry best practices provide for incident and problem resolution, change control, and asset lifecycle management. Through its configuration management database (CMDB) and process integration, Service Manager automatically connects knowledge and information from System Center Operations Manager, System Center Configuration Manager, and Active Directory Domain Services.

Intel too has been developing technologies at the hardware level to improve manageability of rich clients. PCs using Intel’s Core vPro processor are specifically designed for better, easier manageability. Intel has enhanced this functionality via a service pack for Microsoft’s Systems Center Service Manager. The solution now allows IT support personnel to remotely control KVM resources of the problem

computer for easier resolution. Further, remote boot capability allows for support personnel to boot from a remote image regardless of the client's operating system state.

CONCLUSION

IT decision makers have a lot of tools in their arsenal when it comes to tackling the cost of maintaining and managing PCs. Desktop virtualization has emerged as a key technology in this regard and while replacing rich clients with thin clients and serving up a centrally managed desktop image may be attractive to IT decision makers, they should not forget the advances made in existing systems management tools that make it easier to better manage rich clients.

The decision to deploy desktop virtualization versus using traditional systems management tools need not be a binary one. Specific user scenarios should be considered before deploying desktop virtualization and the technology should be deployed where it makes the most sense.

ABOUT TECHAISLE

Techaisle is an actionable data driven market research analyst and consulting company with global coverage focused on SMBs, Emerging Markets and Consumer research.

Go-to-Market strategies require an actionable data delivery solution based on aggregation, focused analytics and dynamic market segmentation. Techaisle's core premise is that data is inherently more valuable when it can be summarized and made actionable. Techaisle provides services in five major areas:

- **Worldwide IT Market and Channel Partner Sizing**, leveraging one of the most comprehensive opportunity sizing databases in the industry, also available on-demand via marketviewportal.com
- **Syndicated Research**, providing deep dive actionable data and analytics based on primary research
- **Custom Consulting** with strong analytical capabilities to uncover opportunity for clients; Survey Research of End Users and Channels across multiple countries; Qualitative research including focus groups and ethnography
- **Segmentation**, based on algorithms that are easily understood, easily deployable and drive actual sales and market understanding
- **Social Media MarketView Tracker**, on-demand, aggregated delivery of sentiments, opinions, buzz, topics and much more from social media such as reviews, blogs, forums and news

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