



# Virtual desktops: User tips from the trenches

Virtual desktops offer benefits, but it can be tricky technology, veterans say.

By [Tim Greene](#), Network World  
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Scripps Networks - the company behind the Food Network, the Cooking Channel and the Travel Channel - relies on VDI for its developer community, says Selene Tolbert, project manager for development operations at the company's Knoxville, Tenn., headquarters.

The company uses collaboration extensively to support its agile software development process and its developers around the world. If developers tap into a virtual desktop remotely and it goes bad, they call up a new one if the old one can't be fixed; the user continues working.

She recommends tracking what tools end users need and when time comes to upgrade gold desktop images, incorporate them.

She says it's imperative to check how licensing differs for applications when they are deployed virtually vs. being installed on PCs. The costs can differ significantly, she says. Some [open source](#) vendors don't care about the licensing but may have versions of their application that might be tuned specifically for cloud virtual desktop deployment.

When choosing how to deploy VDI, businesses should remain open to using desktop-as-a-service offerings, she says. The company chose Quest in 2011 because its DaaS service underpinned by Deskone's VDI platform supported the Citrix HDX virtual desktop protocol, and Scripps was pleased with the quality of Quest's service.

## [Desktop virtualization cheat sheet](#)

It may be more expensive to host VDI in the cloud even with the costs of hardware, cooling, floorspace and staff with their benefits packages. It's worth a few hundred dollars per month extra to avoid all that and have the option to expand the infrastructure rapidly when the need arises, she says. "We didn't want to grow IT to the point where it was taking away from broadcasting," she says.

One lesson she has learned is that end users, particularly in the development community, prefer to choose the platforms they work on. Some Scripps developers want VDI but steer clear of it because they don't want to use Windows, and as a result she is seeking better VDI support for [Linux](#).

About 50 to 80 users opted not to use VDI, so the company still maintains [data center](#) resources for them. But the 57 who do use VDI still represent a reduction in the resources needed.

At MetroHealth Hospital in Grand Rapids, Mich., VDI was embraced early and has been evolving for six years, says Aivars Apsite, technology strategist for the facility.

The hospital employs VMware View and is in the process of replacing endpoints with zero clients. Within five months it will have 1,800 zero clients and 1,000 or fewer PCs. The zero clients will be a mix of Wyse P20s and Wyse P25s OEMed through Cisco. The P25s support USB2 which is needed in some settings.

He's found that it's potentially less costly to employ pooled virtual desktops rather than static ones dedicated to each user.

The idea was to save 25% on the number of sessions the system would support. It cut its virtual desktop licenses from 4,100 static to 3,000 pooled. As it turned out, that grossly overestimated the need, Apsite says. Currently 4,200 Active Directory users use just 1,400 to 1,700 logged in sessions and just 500 to 700 of those simultaneously.

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**AC Reno**

Network Infrastructure is one of the many aspects, so is the back-end storage the VDI is running out of. From experience Fiber Channel is the way to go, the latency of iSCSI may not seem like a concern, just wait until it gets under heavy load with network latency and the bottle neck's begin.

10/19/2012 08:29 AM

[Like](#) [Reply](#)**Crystal Bedell**

There is only a brief mention of the need to evaluate the network infrastructure. This is an important point, and I'd also add the importance of testing end user access from the LAN, WAN and VPN. Each of these connections will have varying access speeds and where access speeds from the LAN may be sufficient, the other two may not. -- Crystal Bedell, <http://tinyurl.com/cd5gtuw>

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