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Battle of Free Virtualization Tools: VMware vs. VirtualBox

July 31, 2013 Contel Bradford [1 Comment \(http://www.storagecraft.com/blog/battle-of-free-virtualization-tools-vmware-vs-virtualbox/#comments\)](http://www.storagecraft.com/blog/battle-of-free-virtualization-tools-vmware-vs-virtualbox/#comments)



Thanks to a handy technology called virtualization, running multiple operating systems and applications on a single host machine is now the norm in IT environments of all sizes. VMware has been the undisputed king of this space for quite some time, but numerous competitors have emerged to challenge its comfy position upon that throne. One of those competitors is IT software giant Oracle, who jumped into the virtual computing game in 2007 with the aptly named VirtualBox. Ladies and Gentleman, for one night one, VMware vs. VirtualBox.

If you pose the question of “which is better?”, “which should I go with”, or anything similar to knowledgeable

IT people, most will say that it's VMware hands down. Ask them to elaborate and they'll likely tell you that VMware is the ultimate solution for server virtualization, while VirtualBox is best suited for virtualizing desktop environments. This may be true in a general sense, but the battle gets far more competitive when comparing Oracle's VirtualBox to something more similar like VMware Player.

Cost and Licenses

VirtualBox and VMware Player are easily two of the most cost effective options on the market of x86 processor virtualization software. Oracle makes its solution available under version two of the General Public License (GPL), an open-source license that allows it to be freely distributed and modified at the source code to accommodate individual needs in functionality. VMware Player, on the other hand, is only freely available for non-commercial usage.

While both applications are free, both can be upgraded to premium packages as well. For instance, VMware Player gets a functional boost when purchasing a commercial license of VMware Fusion Professional, which runs on Mac OS X as well as Microsoft Windows, Linux and other Unix-like systems. VirtualBox can also be upgraded by purchasing commercial licenses directly from Oracle, which gets you enterprise-level features and support for mission-critical usage. When factoring in the dual-licensing component, I think it's safe to say we have a stalemate here.

What to Like

VMware touts its Player software as the most efficient way to run Windows XP in newer systems like Windows 7 and Windows 8. With a solid slab of up-to-date hardware, you can enjoy your legacy apps like XP never went out of style. Additionally, VMware Player provides an ideal environment for effectively testing new apps right on your desktop, essentially eliminating the need to purchase or lease a server for the same purpose. It also supports restricted virtual machines, which is useful when you want to prevent unauthorized IT personnel from tampering with configuration settings.

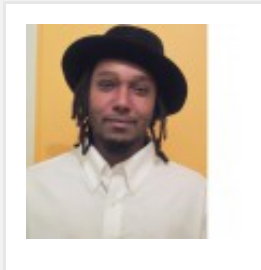
VirtualBox's greatest asset may be its portability. One of its more useful traits is the ability to create a fleet of virtual machines in one host environment and run them in another. For example, an administrator who appreciates the user-friendliness of Microsoft products can set up their VMs in Windows, and then run them in Linux where they are likely to enjoy better performance. Its portability is further enhanced by cross-platform capabilities that allow it to function seamlessly on Windows, Mac OS X, Solaris, and various Linux distributions.

Platform Reliability

The biggest distinction between these two products no doubt rests at the hypervisor level. Type 2 hypervisors like VirtualBox run on a host operating system that delivers all the essential services, which is ideal if you want to use it on your existing desktop or server right out of the box. Type 1 or bare metal hypervisors like VMware Player, run directly on the hardware itself and provide all the services you need within the software package. When virtualization rose to prominence years ago, type 2 hypervisors were all the rage, but now it is widely believed that the type 1 variety is more efficient in terms of performance, security, and availability.

Even with the enterprise functionality and extra support, Oracle's open-source product is going to have a difficult time competing with VMware allstars the likes ESX, Sphere, and Workstation. In the case of VirtualBox against the more proportionate VMware Player, the playing field is about as level as it's going to get between these two brands. In the end, I think most IT experts will agree that both are excellent options for those who either have modest needs, or are just getting started with virtualization.

What about the heavy-hitters? Take a look at our take on [VMware vs. Hyper V](http://www.storagecraft.com/blog/virtualization-wars-vmware-vs-hyper-v-which-is-right-for-your-virtual-environment/) (<http://www.storagecraft.com/blog/virtualization-wars-vmware-vs-hyper-v-which-is-right-for-your-virtual-environment/>).



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VMware Player is not a Type 1 hypervisor, and therefore does not have better performance than Virtualbox "because it runs directly on the hardware."

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