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RDS8 - Quick and Easy, RemoteApp on Windows Server 2012

by Shannon Fritz

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I'll show you how you can set up RemoteApp publishing using a single server in less time than it takes to watch an episode of your favorite drama! Honestly, you should be able to hammer this out in less than an hour if you are at all familiar with the new Windows Server Manager. It's madness (in a good way!). There two things that you will need in place before you start your stop watch:

1. RDS in Windows Server 2012 requires Active Directory, 2003 or newer.
2. One server running a fresh and updated install of Windows Server 2012 joined to that domain.

Once you've got that, break out your stop watch. I'll race you!   From the new Server Manager, click the Manage menu and select Add Roles and Features.
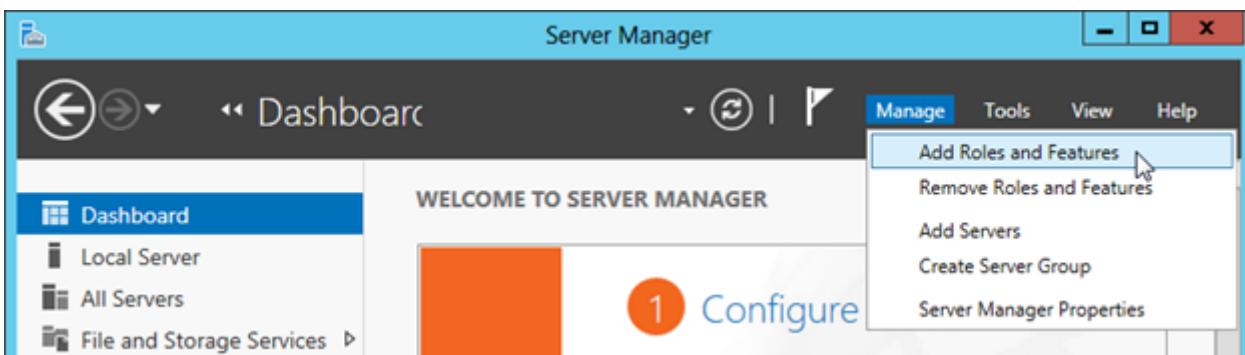

One of many new features that the new Server Manager offers is the introduction of **scenario-based installation**. Remote Desktop Services is the only scenario installation type available, and that's exactly what we want to do.
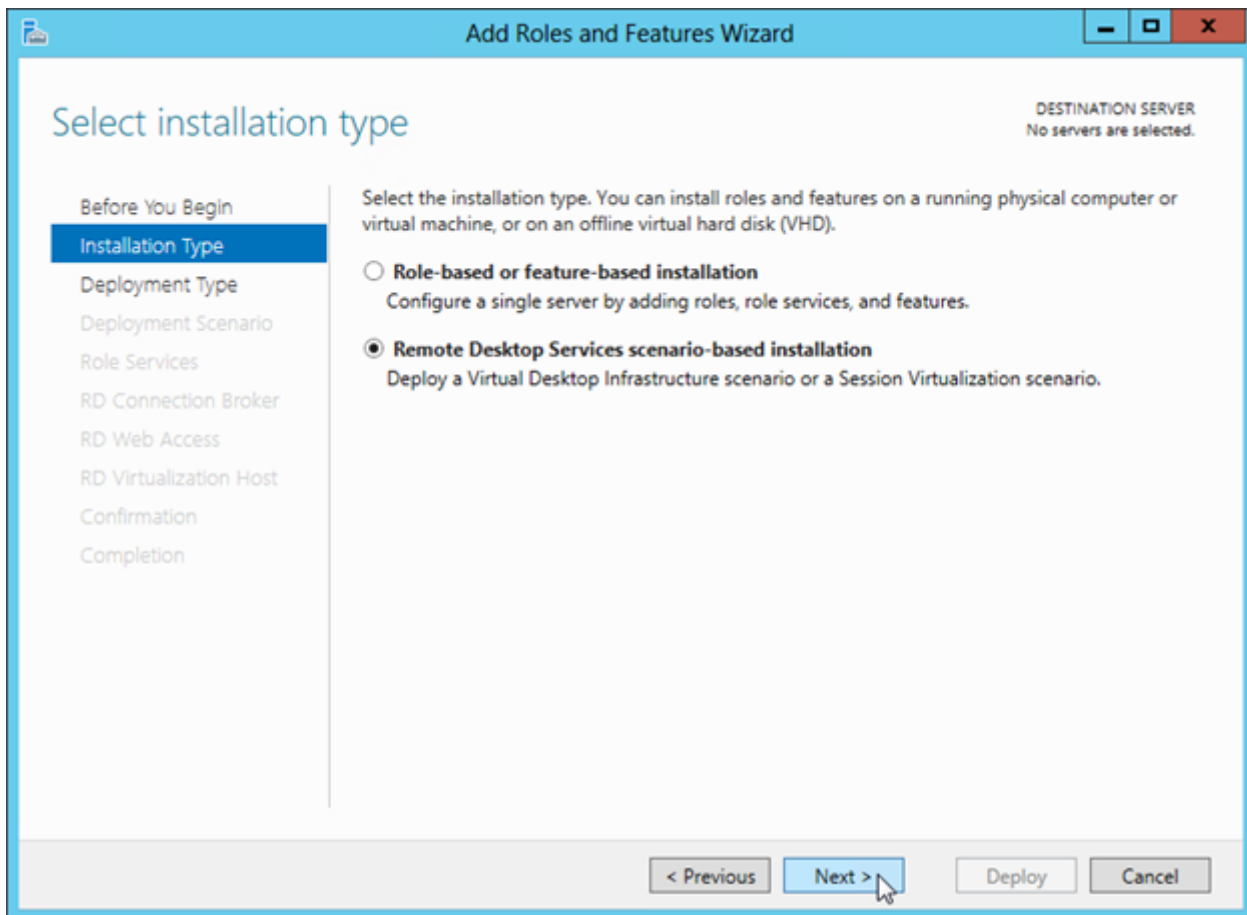
If you really want to see the power of Scenario-Based deployments you'll want to set up three servers and then try the Standard Deployment method, but to get this done quickly we'll just use the **Quick Start** deployment which will put everything on one server.
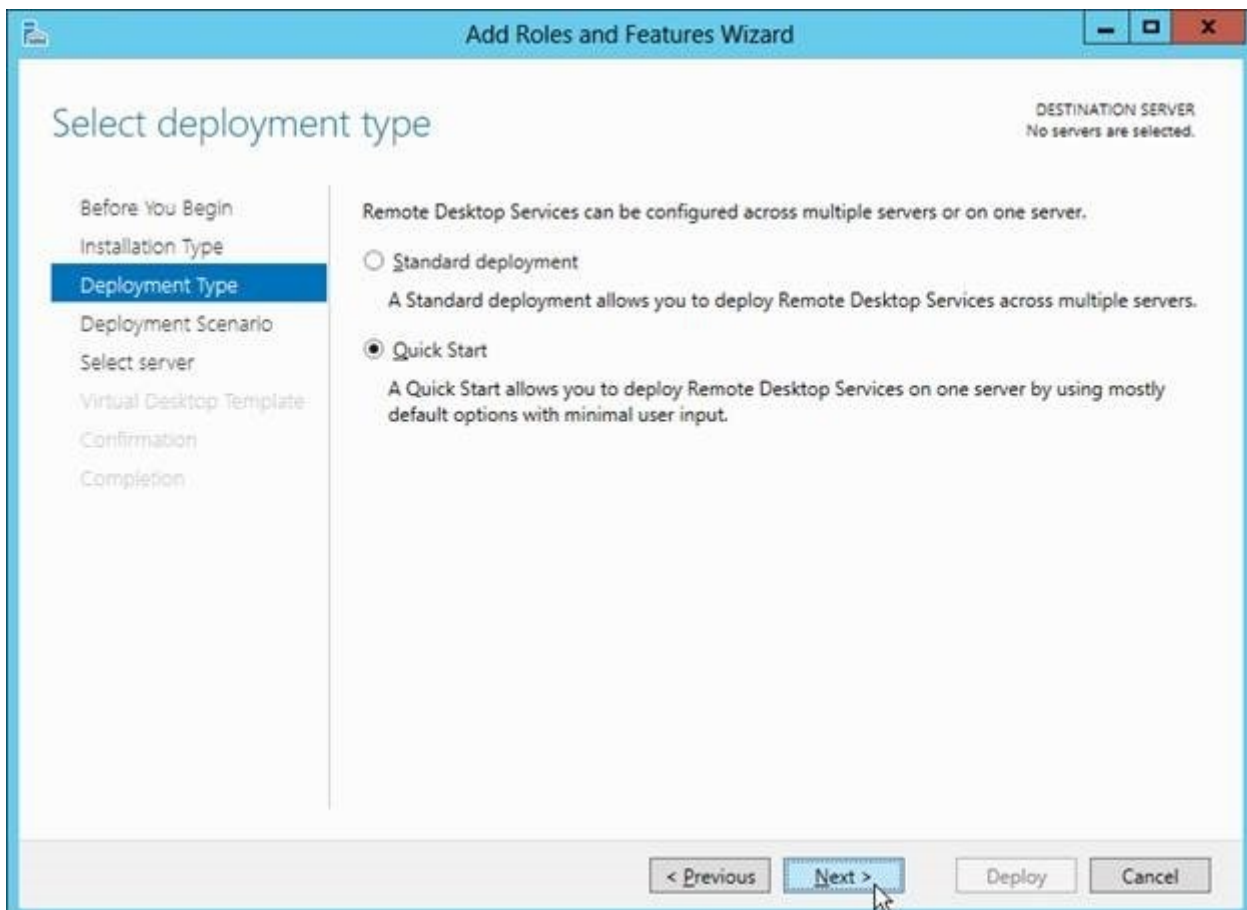
The Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) scenario will be used to allow each user to have their very own virtual machine, but we want to deploy the **Session Virtualization** scenario which is analogous to what everyone thinks of with Terminal Services; multiple user sessions working independently on one server.
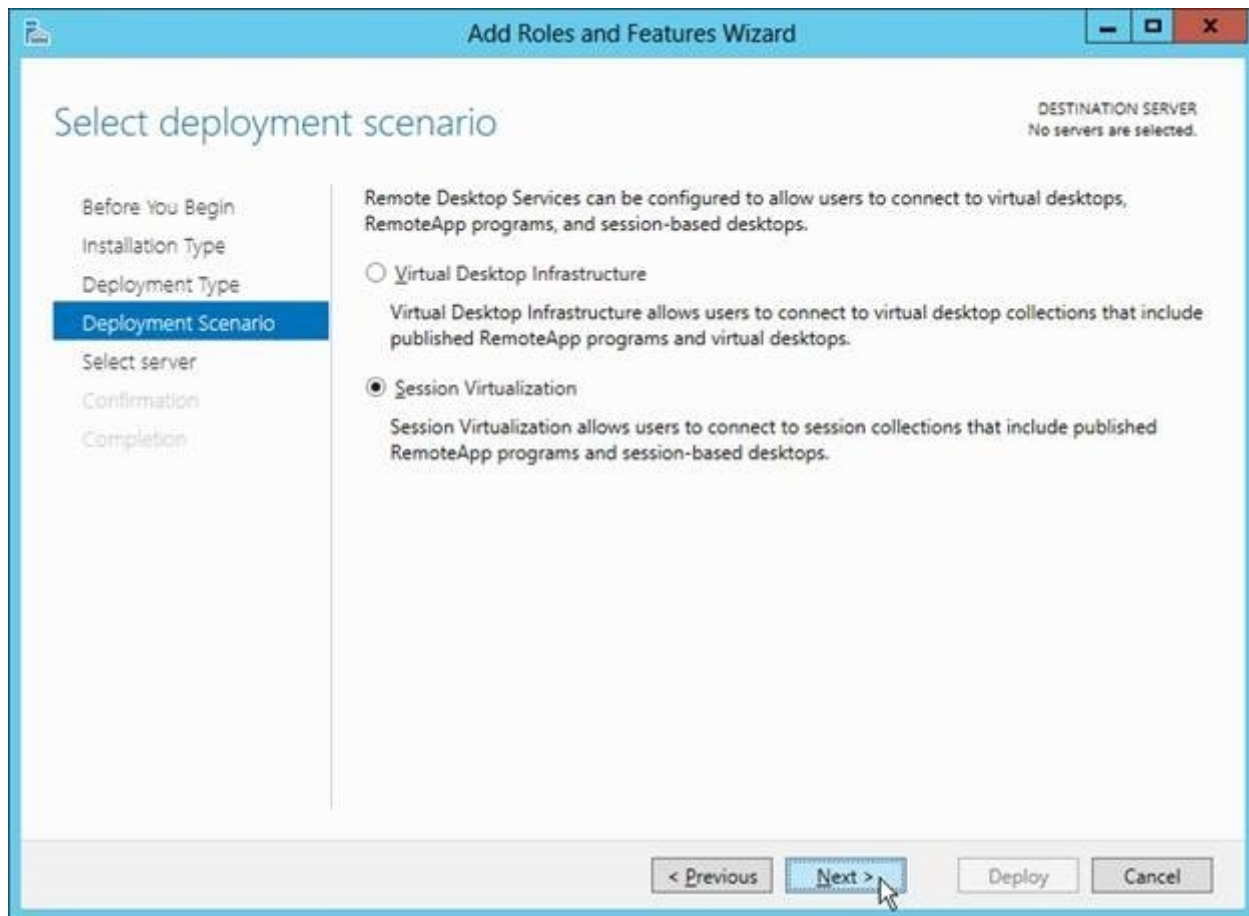

The local server you're connected to should be added to the Selected list by default. Make sure that's the server you are going to deploy all of the RDS roles onto and click Next.
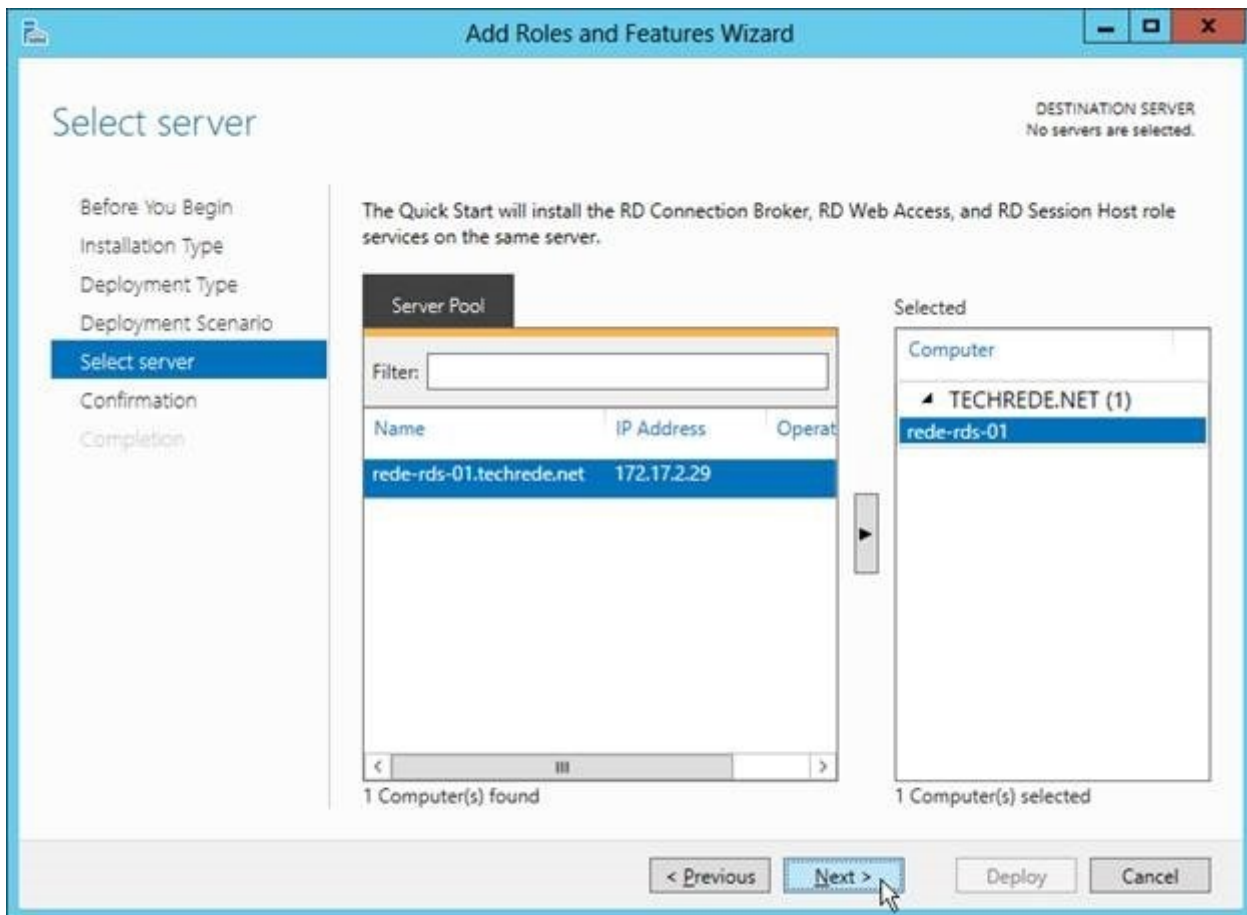
On the Confirmation page you'll have to check the "Restart" option as the installation of the Session Host role requires a reboot. Then click Deploy.
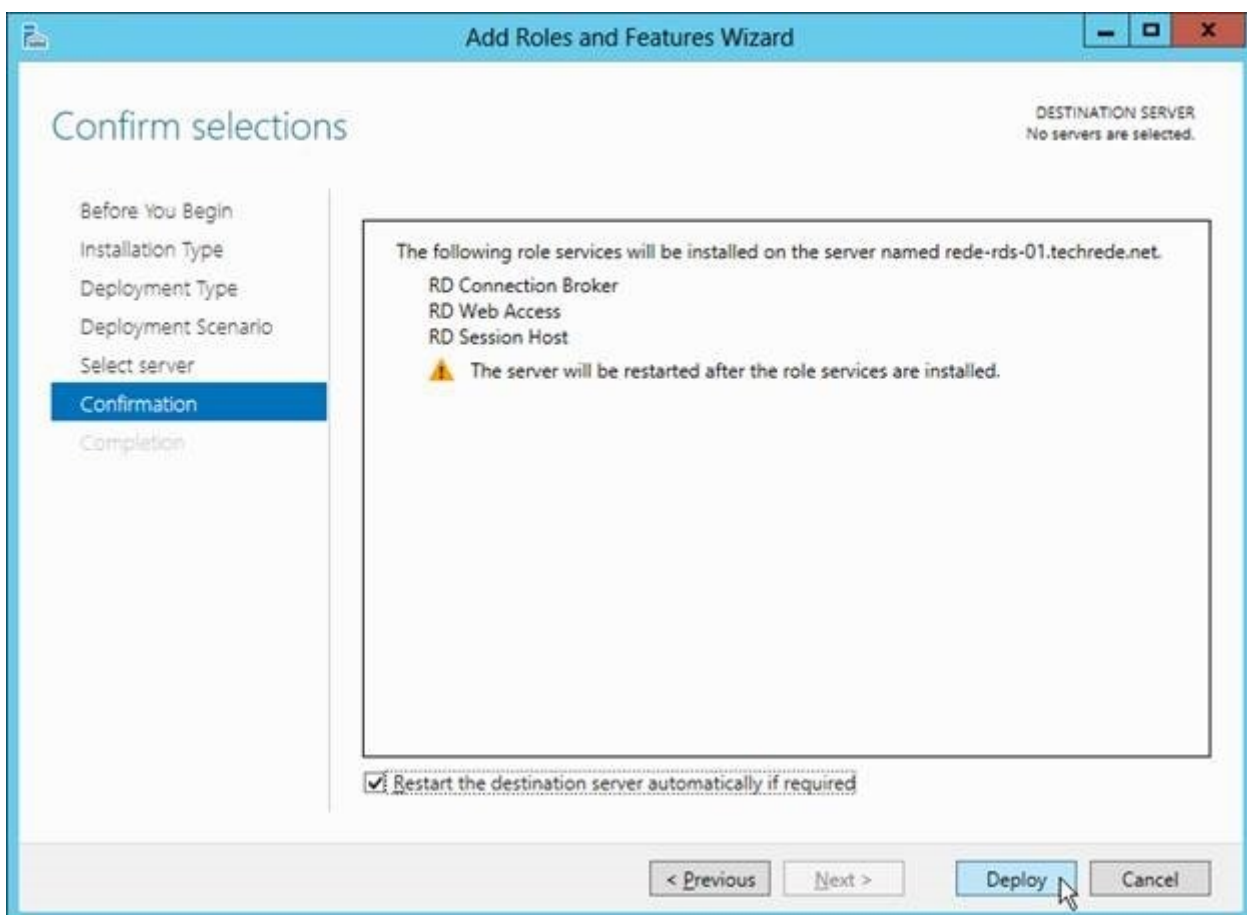
After the reboot, log back into the server and the Server Manager should resume to show you the status: Succeeded! Click the link at the bottom of the page to view the list of available RemoteApps.
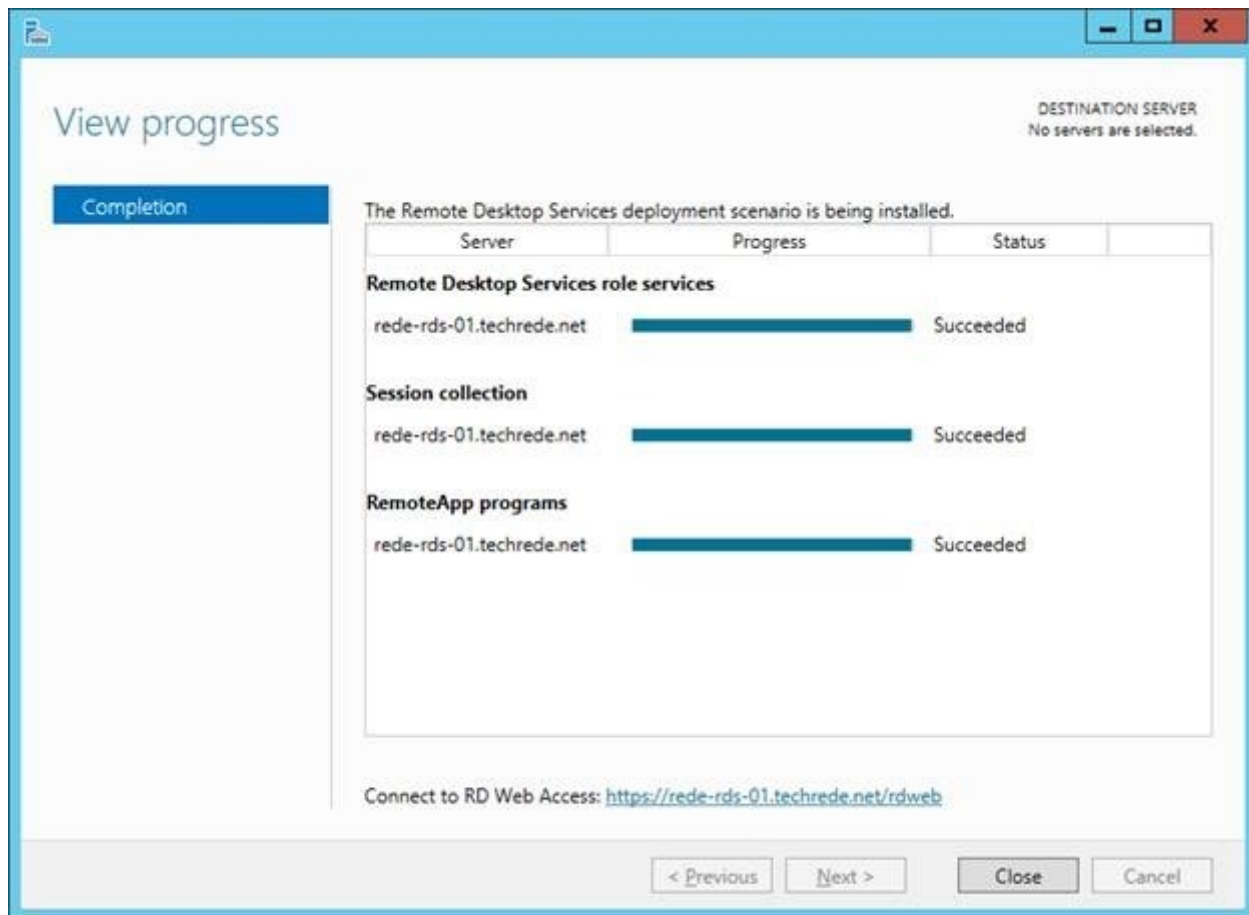
When connecting to the RDWeb page, you'll get a certificate warning because the quick deployment uses a self-signed certificate which can be replaced later, so click Continue to this web site for now.
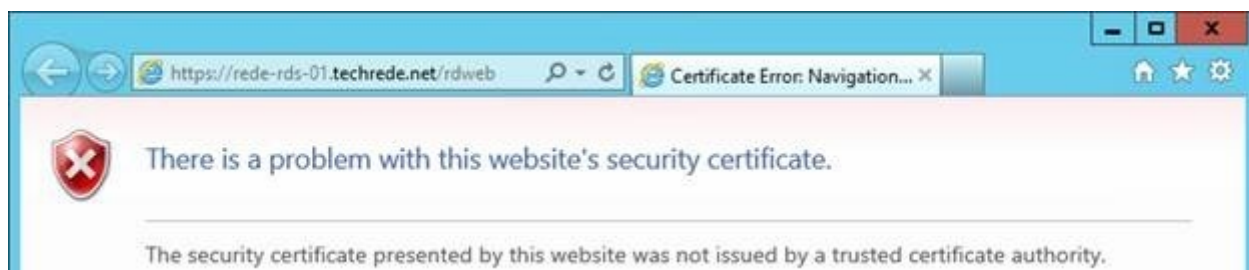
You'll also be prompted to run an Active-X Control which is the mechanism that allows the web site to launch the Remote Desktop client. You can click Allow here, but a Group Policy can be made to allow this automatically.
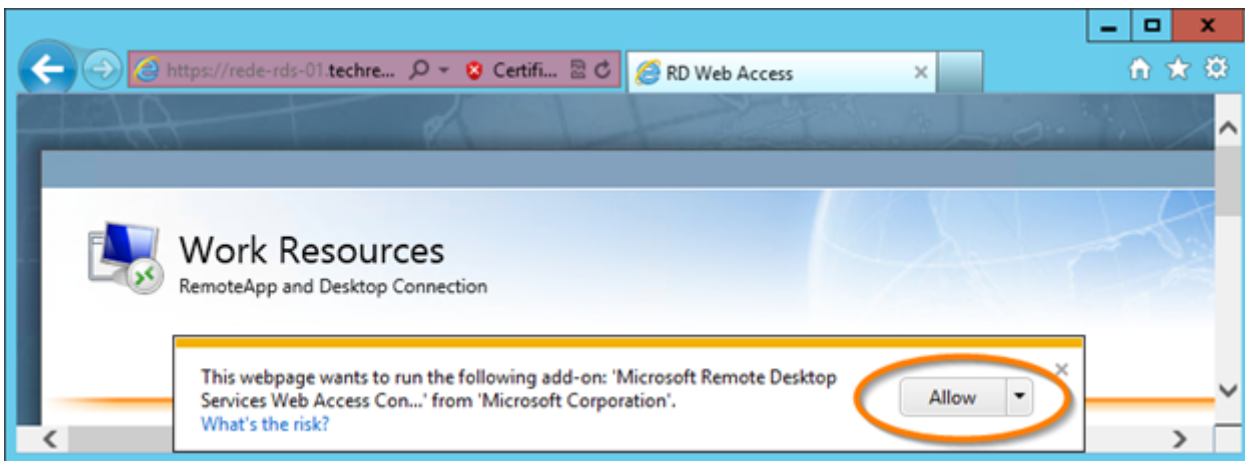
Once connected, you'll see a huge list of applications that are published already. This is a result of using the Quick Start deployment, and we're not going to want to publish all of these Apps, so let's take care of that right away.
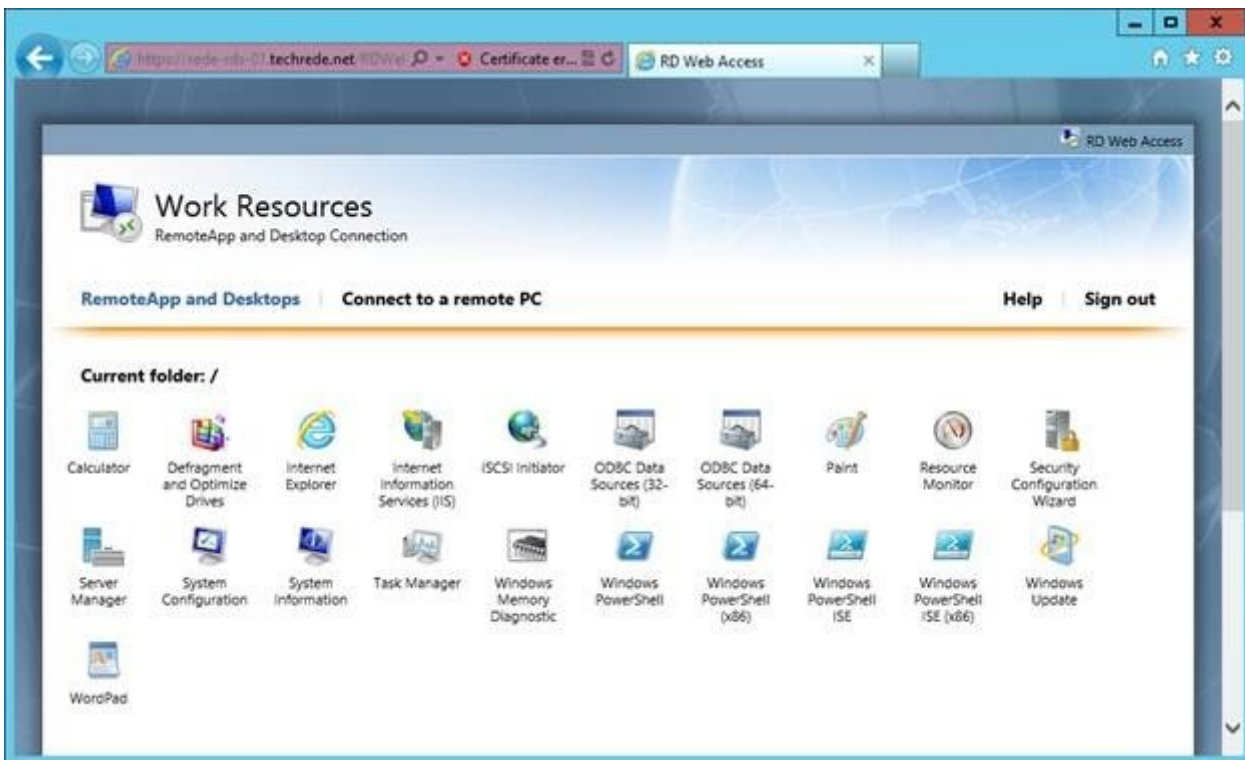

Return to the Server Manager and click on the new "Remote Desktop Services" page on the left, then click on Collections. "Collections" is a new term that describes a set of services that the RDS deployment offers such as a collection of RemoteApps, Desktop Sessions or Virtual Desktops.
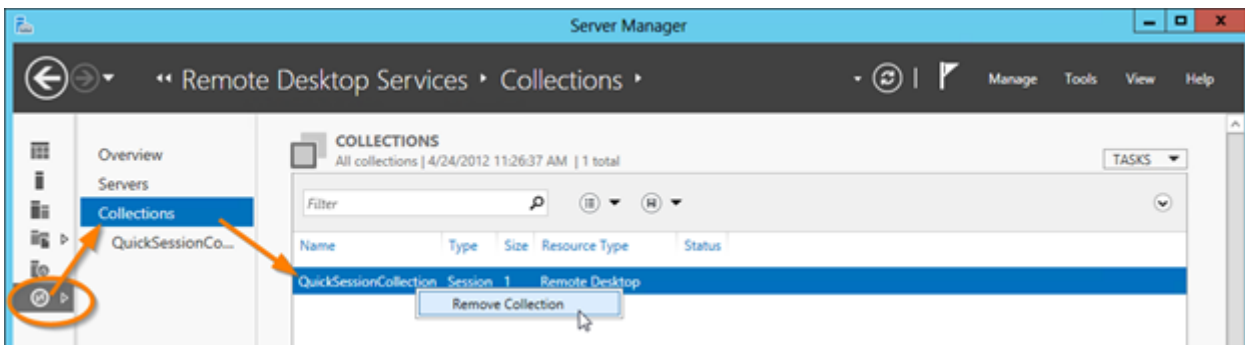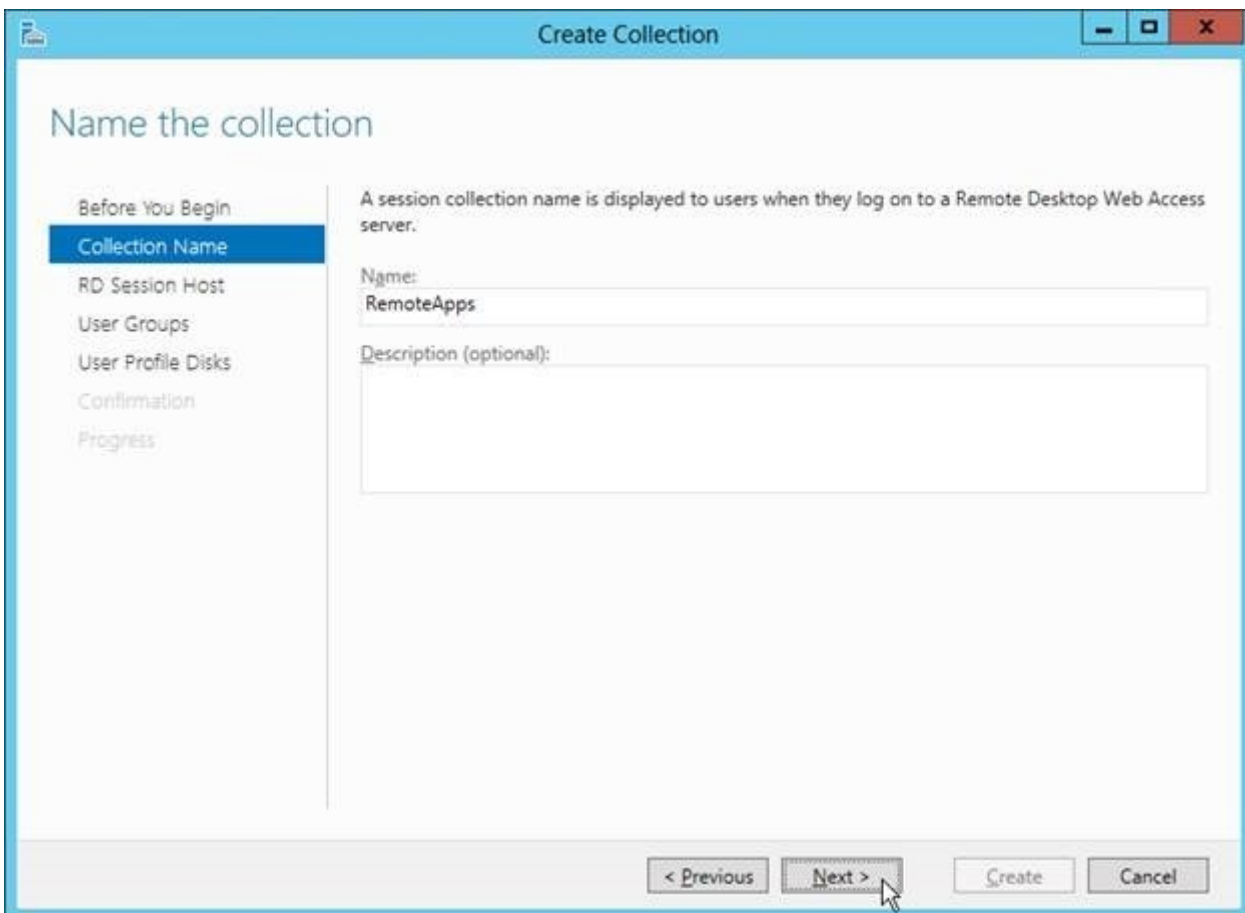
The Quick Start deployment already created a collection for us, but we'll want to remove it and start from scratch. Right click the QuickSessionCollection and click "Remove Collection. Then from the Tasks button, select Create Session Collection.
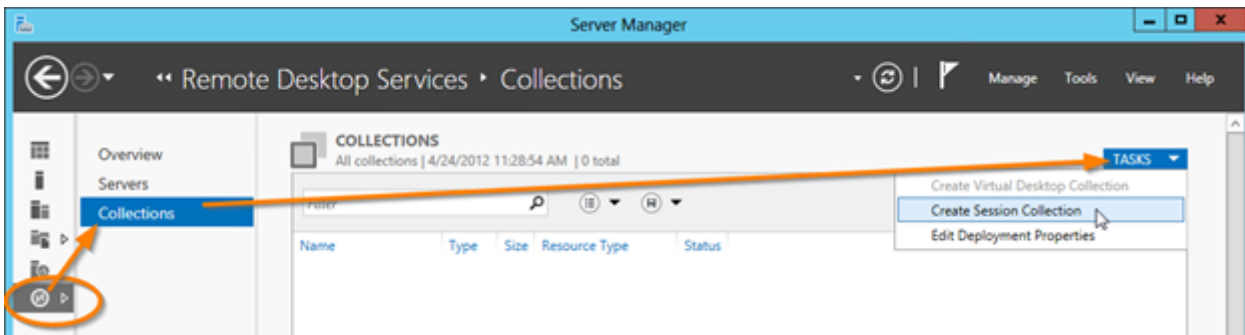
Enter a Collection Name, something clever like RemoteApps works well.

Now select your Session Host server and click the arrow to add it to the Selected list. There should only be the one server available here so it's pretty straight forward.
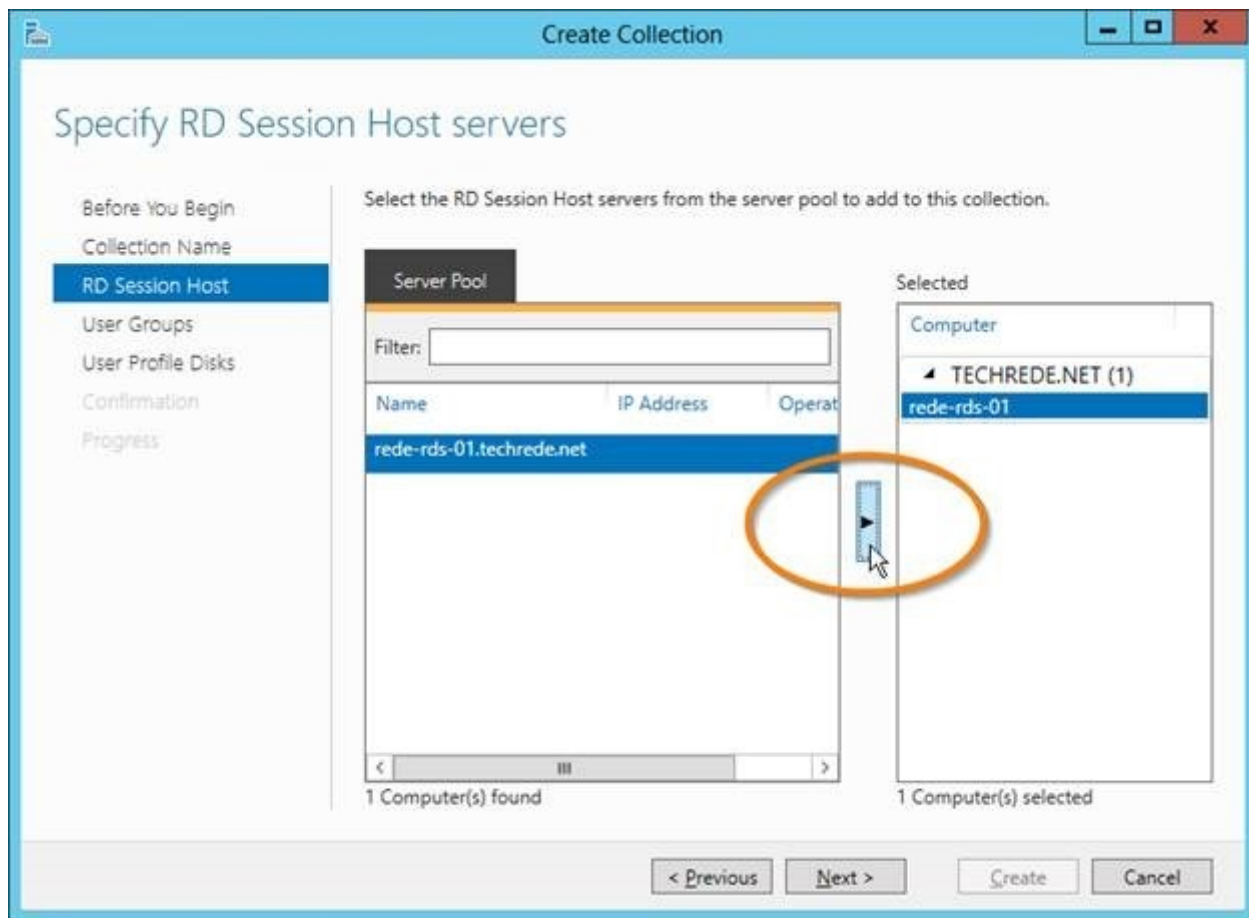
The default group of users that are allowed to access the applications in this collection will be Domain Users. You can be more specific if you wish, but you can also be more specific on an individual application bases as you publish them later.
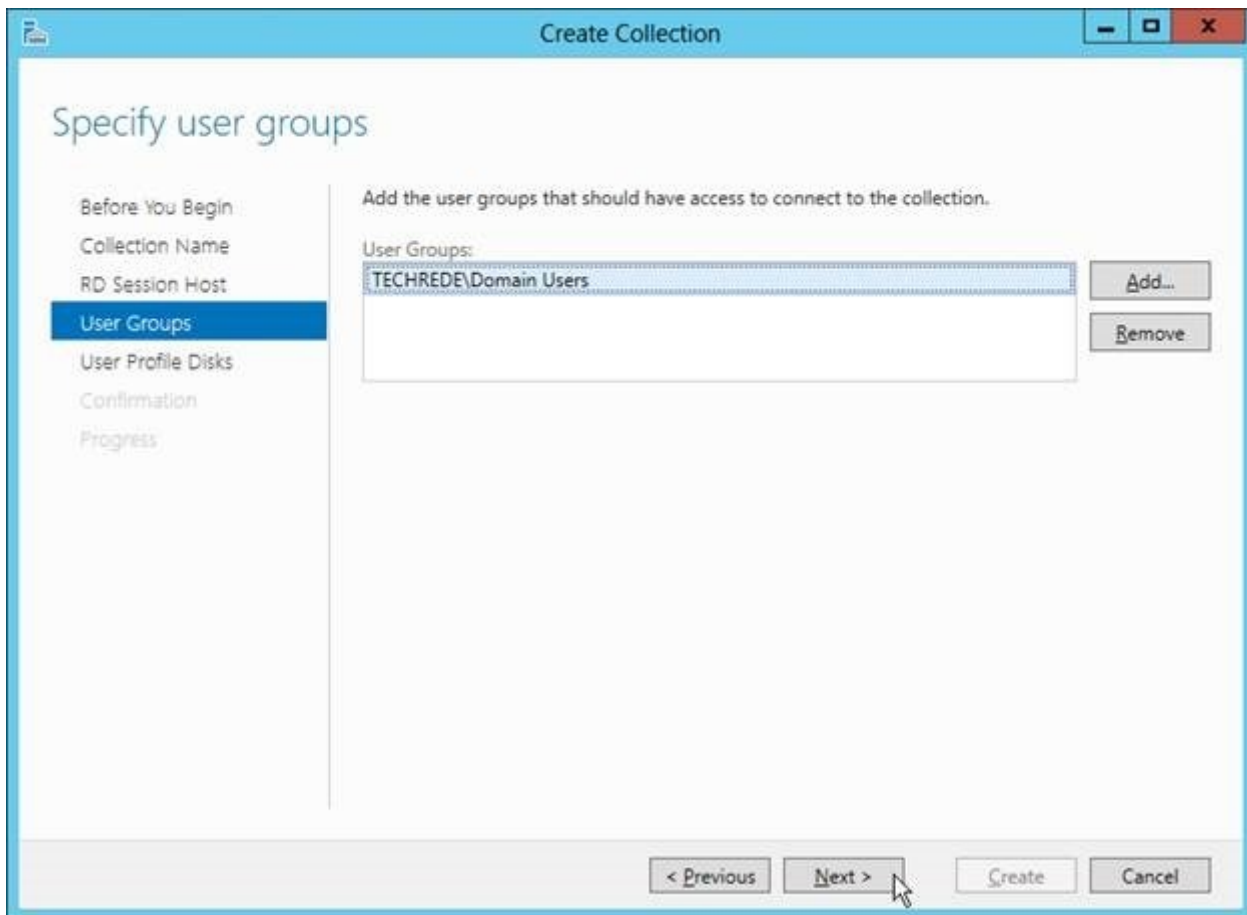
To keep things moving quickly, let's skip the User Profile Disks for now. This is a very cool new feature of Windows Server 2012 (8 beta) that allows users on the session host to have their "local" data get automatically redirected to a different virtual hard drive instead of getting written to the actual session host server, but you can configure that later.Click **Next** then **Create** to finish the Collection wizard.

When it's done, you can click Close.

Now it's time to publish the applications you really want to give users access to. From the **Remote Desktop Services** page, select the new **RemoteApps collection** you made and then from the **Tasks** button by RemoteApp Programs, select **Publish RemoteApp Programs**.
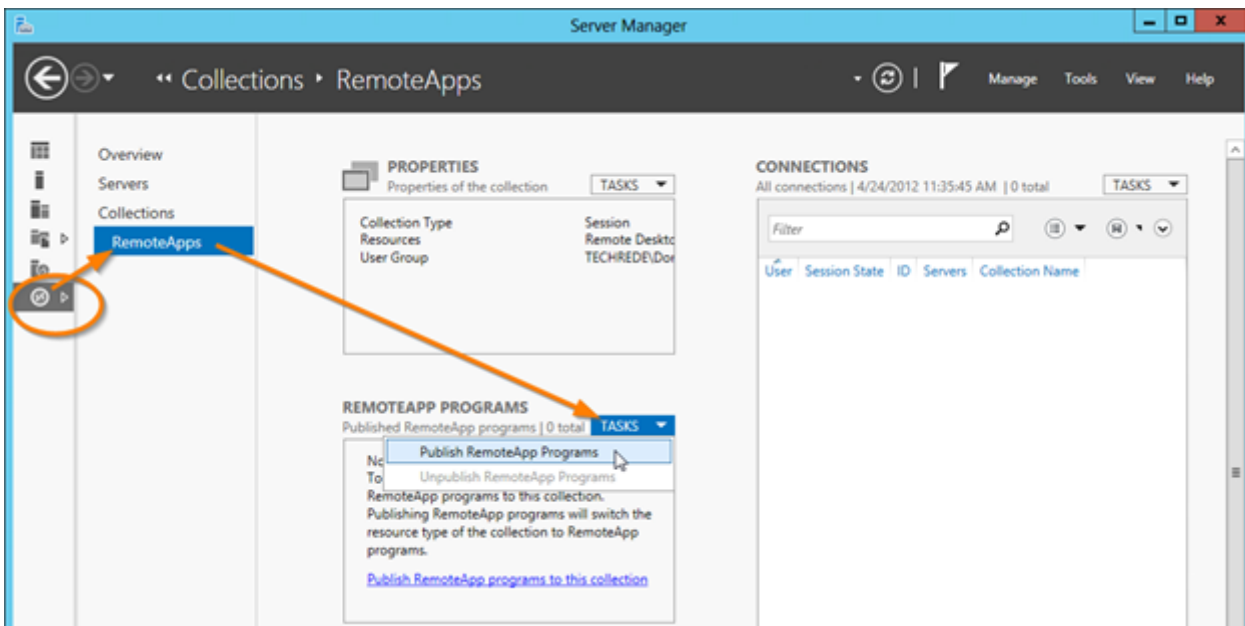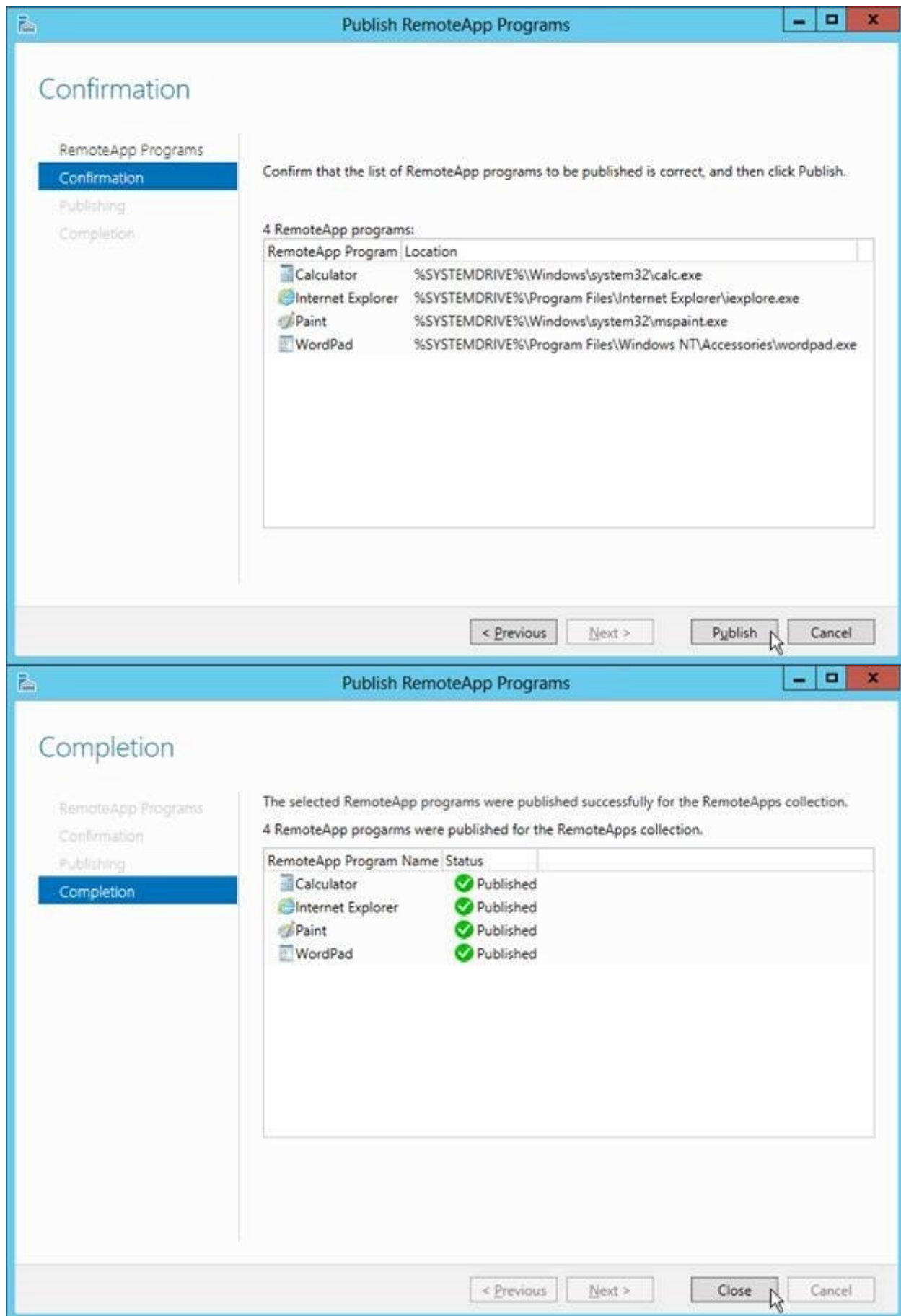
You can select a program from the list or click "**Add Another Program**" to browse to an executable.
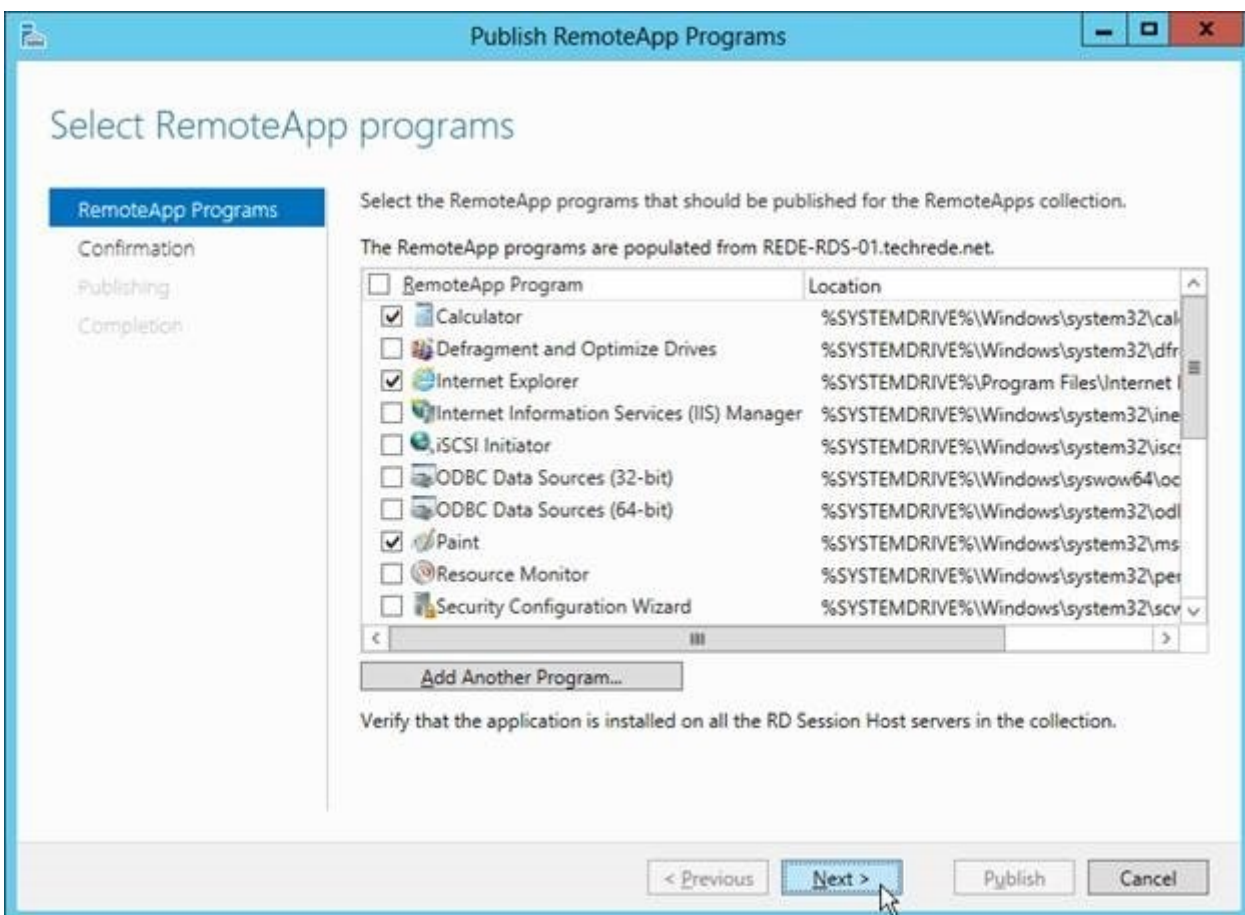
When you're happy with your selection click Publish, then Close.Now refresh the RDWeb page and you'll see only the applications that you selected.

Click on one of them to connect to the RemoteApp. This prompt is Internet Explorer warning you that the Web Site is trying to start a program on your computer. It's using the Active-X Control to launch the local RDP client (mstsc.exe). This warning can be suppressed by Group Policy once the web site certificate is replaced, but for now just click Connect.
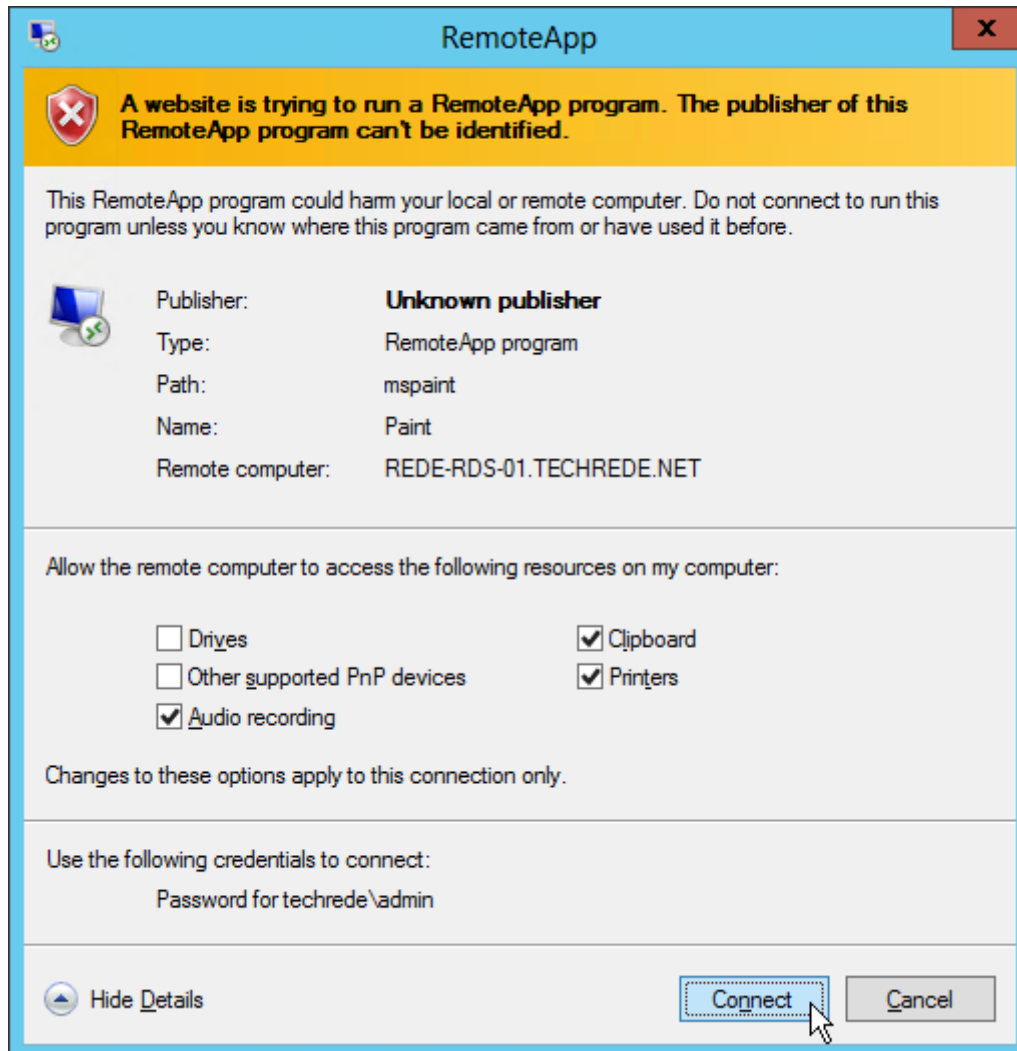
Once connected, the application would look just like any locally installed application, but you'll notice a new system tray icon that show you are connected to a Remote Work Place.
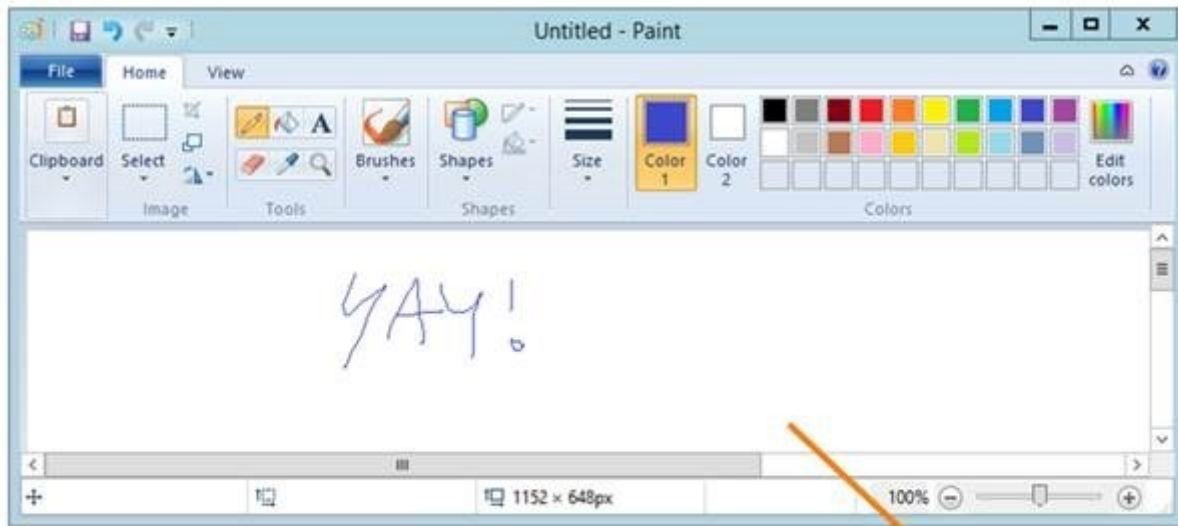
And there you have it, RDS, Quick and Easy on one server in less than an hour.
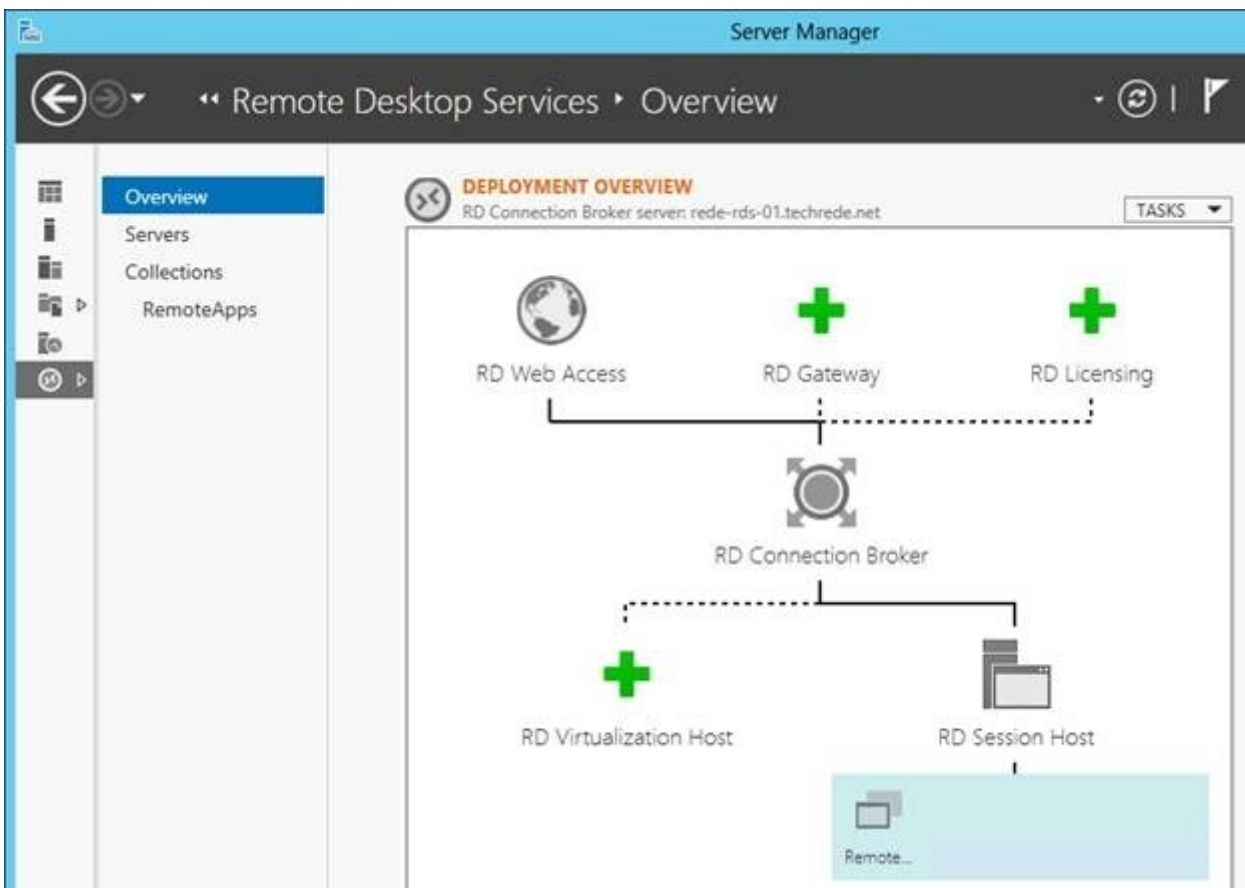
Now you can install new applications and publish them to your Collection. Just like Windows 2008 R2, you can deliver these RemoteApps from RDWeb or by subscribing to the RemoteApp RSS feed. If you want to make these applications available outside of your organization, the next step will be to deploy the RD Gateway role, or if you want to go bigger, try doing a Standard Deployment to break the roles out to separate servers and add more Session Hosts, the equivalent to a RDS Farm. N'joy!

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