Mike Nelson – SVD article

XenDesktop Remote PC Offering Just to "Simple"?

When Citrix released the latest version of XenDesktop, version 5.6 FP1 (Feature Pack 1), one of the new additions to the product was a new FlexCast technology called Remote PC. This small management server broker, that utilizes the existing available Virtual Desktop Agent, allows for users to be assigned to physical computers in the XenDesktop environment along with their current virtual desktop assignments, if you allow them that experience. Let's take a look at the product and review some of the rants and raves about it already coming out from the user community.

When I first heard about the potential offering earlier this year, my initial thought was that Citrix would be doing the smart thing and finally bundling their "GoToMyPC" offering with XenDesktop. Well, needless to say I was wrong in my assumption, and sorry to see that Citrix failed again at possibly gaining a whole new market share by incorporating their flagship remote control pc product in their virtual offering to provide a complete, well-rounded remote desktop solution. But, they did incorporate a very basic Remote PC option, and it is very limited in functionality on purpose. Their comments was that they wanted to "keep it simple" and not have the overhead of all the other bells and whistles of a full featured remote control product. I can go along with that line of thinking to a point, especially when a user reaches that point to which they truly need the missing features. I'll explain more of that later on.

To get Remote PC up and running in your XenDesktop environment, it is a very simple process. You need to be running XenDesktop version 5.6 FP1 and optionally, you'll can install the Remote PC management server software (in reality, just a PowerShell script believe it or not) on your existing Desktop Delivery Controllers (DDC's). This script allows for the creation groups, assignment of physical computers to users, and assignment of policies in the Desktop Studio. You do not need to install this if you have no desire to manage the physical desktops and want to assign the machines manually. Then, there is the client piece that needs to be installed on every physical computer you wish to host in your XD environment. The client is just the usual Virtual Desktop Agent (VDA) that currently gets installed on your virtual desktops. After that installation, you should be able to either add a user manually to a desktop, or add the computer to a new catalog and assign it a user in the Desktop Studio, depending if you installed the management server script or not. If you didn't do that install, to assign the machine, just have the user log into it (not in a RDP session, but physically at the computer) and they will be automatically assigned.

Now that we have our physical machines assigned and running, let's take a look at what we can and cannot do with the new functionality. Of course, you can do remote control of the computer from anywhere that you can access a XenApp or Storefront

connection. This includes using all the local resources of the machine, printers, network drives, USB peripherals, etc. Also, since it is a Citrix ICA-centric technology, you also get the benefits of HDX, which allows for DirectX and 3D graphics acceleration (great for playing games remotely, but who has time to do that??). But, that seems to be the extent of the "can do" portion, which I find troubling.

I believe that a usable Remote PC software implementation should be able to do more, especially for users who are accessing the remote machines for extended period of time, such as on long business trips, sabbaticals or extended leaves, or even vacations (really?), and they need the extra pieces that are missing from this "simple" version. I do understand the argument that this is just an easy and simple way to allow access to physical machines and that if you want more functionality, then buy our more expensive product. But, then I would ask why are they not putting more effort into integrating the more expensive and feature rich option into XenDesktop, which, in my opinion, would make it a more complete, all around remote desktop solution? Where is the file transfer functionality? Where are the remote reboot and reset control options? And most of all, and a real pet peeve of mine with Citrix is, where is the Mac support, let alone Linux support (yes, people do run Linux workstations)? Every product Citrix makes, their product teams treat the Mac capability as an afterthought even though in their own corporate culture of BYOD, over 50% of their employees use Macs. Frustrating.

I like the Remote PC product offering, I really do. But I feel it needs to be more. For the cost of licensing and SA that users are paying now for the "Platinum" suite line item in their Citrix contracts, they should have the full featured "everything" software included, not just limited "simple" software. Somewhere in Citrix there has to finally be light bulb going off above someone's head, isn't there?