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The Frustration Factor of Application Delivery on Mobile Devices

The ability to remotely deliver corporate applications to mobile devices is really a cool idea. But, the ability to actually make those applications useful and increase productivity would be even more awesome, if it really worked for most corporate applications, which, it really doesn't. This is where the frustration comes in, for both the users and I.T.

First though, we have to differentiate between the two classes of applications in this scenario. There are the applications that are developed specifically for the mobile devices, and then there are the applications that are not. As an example, apps that you download via the Apps Store from iTunes are made for use on mobile devices and not desktops. But, most apps that are presented on your company's local network, such as Office suites, are not developed with mobile devices in mind. The key in this is the development of applications, how they are coded, and how they are "scalable" to different devices in their presentation.

When the iPhone made its debut some years ago, there was much hype in corporate circles about the ability to allow users to do their work while mobile. Other smartphone vendors have touted this for a few years before, but it really came to the forefront with the iPhone introduction, since everyone had to have one and it was a very "cool" device to have. And that is when the issues, which mostly had already been identified with other smartphone vendors prior to the iPhone launch, somehow came to the forefront of conversations and debates between users, I.T., and management.

The delivery method may have not been an issue, thanks to vendors such as Citrix for creating their Receiver client specifically for these devices. But, the bigger problems come in when you try and deliver an application that was not made for that type of device, and that the device was not made to act like a desktop. One of the biggest issues I hear about quite a bit from users is how the applications are presented on the mobile screen. I had one user who actually attempted to load an Excel workbook that contained over 20 worksheets, with charts and graphs, on his iPhone via Citrix. Not only did it not load after many minutes, it also locked up the phone and crashed his session. Of course, the user then said to me, "Well it works on my laptop, why won't it work on my iPhone?" (Sounds very similar to conversations about Virtual Desktops, doesn't it?). And our conversation quickly went downhill from there.

I do believe that the introduction of larger devices such as the iPad have alleviated some, but not all, of these frustrations that we hear about from users, but it still has some room for improvements. I pretty much believe that two things that have to happen to make remote application delivery on mobile devices work in an organization. First, everyone has to have the same set of expectations. This is pretty much an I.T. standard for any new shiny object that users and management are running after. Second, your corporate application developers and vendors have to jump, or be pushed, on the mobility bus. Just like you can go to many a website on the Internet today and either select to view the mobile version of the site or have it preloaded for you, we should have that same flexibility with applications. Until that happens with your corporate apps, remember, *Pinch, Squeeze, and Swipe*.

