

Mike Nelson – SVD article

Who Should Really Use VDI-based Virtual Desktops

Back in 2008, VDI was the hottest technology, with advocates saying that it “is the latest and greatest cool solution to implement for *all* of your users”. No more desktops, run them all from the datacenter. Now in 2012, VDI has aged and become the “neat thing to do for me and my users, but only if it really works” solution. With all the changes to this technology over the years, it’s time to take a few steps back and re-examine one of the core reasons you wanted to go there in the first place – your users and what they do.

So what kind of users do you have? First off, let’s define some basic user types and their possible location scenarios that should pretty much cover anyone that works for your company. There are, of course, exceptions and many folks will blend in between the types and methods, but you get the general idea.

Type	Examples	Local?	Remote?	Mobile?	Roaming?
Kiosk Users	Public, non-employee	Yes	No	No	No
Task Workers	Call center, assembly line, receptionist	Yes	Possibly, but often limited to out-sourced	No	Yes, between offices, branches
Knowledge Workers	SAP, finance, executives, sales reps	Yes	Yes	Yes, especially Sales and Executives	Yes, between offices, client sites
Power Users	Code developers, graphic developer, audio/video producer	Yes	Yes, various locations	Not common since they need a lot of computing power and peripherals	Yes since they want to be able to go anywhere and work

When I mention “Kiosk” users in this article, I am referring to the someone who would walk up to a multi-user shared desktop, such as ones found in a hotel business center, and be able to use all its allowed functionality without providing any type of credential access. In my opinion, these machines are almost the perfect situation to deploy as a dynamic or “provisioned” virtual desktop. It would only connect to a non-secure network, and if anything ever went wrong with it, it’s as easy as a few clicks to spin up another just like brand new. This solution may only be financially and administratively feasible if you had many of these Kiosk’s deployed,

had other types of users using virtual desktops in your company, or you relied on a contracted partner to supply and maintain them for you.

Task Workers are also prime candidates for provisioned virtual desktops, with some caveats that I have had experience with. Again, pretty much the same principal applies as Kiosk users in such that if something happens to a CSR's (Customer Service Rep) desktop, they are back up and running in just a short time. But, believe it or not, many folks who work in a Call Center and maybe as a traveling receptionist really love to have their own *personalized* desktop. There's one of your key words to remember when making user decisions, as you will come to hear many complaints about how they cannot save their files locally, or their wallpaper background isn't what it was yesterday. All the things that matter, right? There are software solutions out there to help with this "major" dilemma, as some users will call it, but you could also consider changing them over to a *private* virtual desktop, or a "1:1 image" as it's called. I don't highly recommend this though since, by deploying that type of desktop, you have just doubled or even tripled you're per desktop cost, depending on how you measure that impact in your infrastructure (i.e. additional SAN disk, network, etc.). But, having said that, I have changed some over and after all is said and done, it may be the best for you and users.

I really wanted to classify Executives as Task Workers, since I have hardly ever met one that used 1/8th the technology that was given to them, but I held back since maybe there are some out there that do actually use it (isn't there?). The Knowledge Worker is a toss-up in my opinion. You might have a split field down the middle on hardware desktops versus virtual desktops, or you may lean one way or the other. Any way you shake it up though, I haven't had a client yet that has tipped the scale all the way towards virtual desktops for these folks. I have had some go all the way towards hardware desktops, mainly due to cost and ROI comparisons that just did not work out for them on the VDI side, but some due to virtual desktops just not "working out" for these users. I am glad for them, as they did their due diligence and found that out *before* they did a deployment, which could have turned out as a disaster if the users could not be productive. In this type of user, these folks are pretty smart cookies when it comes to utilizing the technology and trying to get the most out of their desktops. They are also slightly heavy on the Mobile and Remote side, so they need that to work for them, wherever they go. A virtual desktop may not be the answer here, but remote application delivery solution, such as Microsoft's RDS or Citrix XenApp, will improve their out of office productivity dramatically.

Power Users are pretty much a wash in my experience. They need the power of their hardware desktop, the hardware peripherals such as media readers and Watcom's, and the higher end, resource hogging software that just doesn't (at least not yet) work well on a "standard" virtual desktop. Now, I say "standard" since you could technically devote a lot of backend resources to the virtual desktops you give these users which will make things a little better, but then I call into question your return on investment and how much work is involved on your part. I do have some folks that are doing very well in supplying their off-shore developers a virtual desktop,

and they do work, but more often than not, most are traded back in for a shipped piece of hardware. Although there are some promising technologies out there to reduce those costs, today the backend datacenter costs for these is still, for most, just too high.

Finally, and let me hop up on my soap box here a minute, there is one misconception about VDI is that a Virtual Desktop will solve all the desktop configuration and deployment issues and provide the user with all the apps and files they need. While the latter half is mostly true, the first is pretty much false in my opinion. Everyone has become so engrossed in VDI solving it all, that they forget about another technology that has provided a solution for users to access remote applications for over a decade, Terminal Services (now called Remote Desktop Services). Do your users really need a full desktop? Or do they just need to be able to access their applications? These questions, and a whole lot more, should be asked before you move your I.T. , company, and users towards VDI. Solutions like RDS or XenApp could be just what you need, or like some, mix them up with VDI. They all play very well together and could make your life, and especially your users' lives, much easier.