



## Virgin Trains bolsters its customer service productivity by 300 hours per day with VMware Mirage

### INDUSTRY

UK Rail Operator

### CHALLENGE

- Make timely desktop migration to Windows XP
- Boost productivity
- Speed up delivery and changes to apps, operating system and data
- Introduce better Disaster Recovery tolerance and data security
- Centralise and enhance desktop management

### SOLUTION

VMware Mirage was used to create a centralised base image for all desktops including Windows 7. Patching, application updates and data backup was then undertaken silently with zero impact on client performance to enable greater control and management over the desktop estate.

### RESULTS

- Breakthrough to boosting 300+ man hours daily
- Boost given to customer service due to better performing desktop IT
- Failed machines rebuilt or restored in as little as two hours as opposed to several days
- New applications deployed to 5 day SLA instead of 6 weeks
- Centralised management and control whilst silent to users

Virgin Trains desktop IT estate was dramatically impacting staff productivity - the result of slow boot up, shutdown and resume times, and was creating significant user dissatisfaction in the process. Working with VMware Enterprise Solutions Partner, Spherica, VMware Mirage was chosen to help Virgin Trains safely migrate to a new operating system (OS) and enjoy greater IT agility, simplified management, more resilience and reclaim significant lost productivity.

Virgin Trains is the most experienced long-distance rail operator in the UK. Responsible for the West Coast Main Line, the route serves more than 32m passenger journeys annually. Virgin Trains has travelled over 145 million miles in the UK and currently holds 89% of the UK air and rail market between London and Manchester. The cornerstone of Virgin Trains' business is their commitment to providing a safe, high quality service. Making IT services available and putting important business information in the hands of staff is imperative to deliver upon this vision.

### Business Challenges

Delays caused by the rail franchising process had postponed a planned desktop refresh. And with end of support looming for the operating system, the refresh was now critical.

Virgin Trains faced several other challenges driving the need for a new solution:

### System response times

User dissatisfaction was running high because of slow performing machines and lengthy boot up, shut down and resume times caused by software backing up local data and patching. On average each worker was subject to a 30 minute daily delay which was having a direct impact on customer service. "The ageing IT equipment was holding us back. We needed to give users something that would enable them to deliver the great customer experience we strive for, not hinder it," explains Stuart Mackcracken, IT Project Manager at Virgin Trains.

### Maintaining customer service

400 of Virgin Train's 1000 workers are mobile laptop users. The need to respond

quickly in the eventuality of system issues was critical to keeping them productive whilst on the go, delivering an outstanding customer experience. Without their machines, access to essential data and services is not possible and providing a mobile user with a fully rebuilt machine following hardware failure could take up to five days. This was an unacceptable turnaround that was impacting customer service deliverability.

### Application management

Delivering a new application was a gruelling process that would typically take up to six weeks. Limited visibility surrounding the number of applications also added to the challenges surrounding publishing anything new. As such, only applications considered a priority were ever deployed.

Outside of any functional changes, the IT department was determined to be more agile as a result of the solution, and keep in step with business demands through innovation with technology.

***“VMware Mirage has helped us boost our productivity by 300 hours a day, the result of a faster performing, better managed desktop environment.”***

Stuart Mackcracken, IT Project Manager,  
Virgin Trains

***“VMware Mirage ensures we have a really good user experience so they can focus on delivering the outstanding customer experience we pride ourselves on.”***

Stuart Mackcracken, IT Project Manager,  
Virgin Trains

### Transformation Roadmap

Virgin Trains needed to migrate from XP to Windows 7 ahead of the end of support deadline. This compelling event therefore drove the defining timeline. The objectives for the refresh project were clear:

- improve desktop performance - a three minute boot up time was mandated
- centralise and enhance desktop management for IT
- make application changes, patching and data backup unobtrusive to the users
- speed up response to desktop failure
- accelerate delivery time of new applications within the environment.

Various solutions were evaluated including; Citrix XenApp, Microsoft SCCM and VMware View. However, with such a large number of mobile workers requiring offline working, Virgin Trains felt VMware Mirage would be the best solution. “We really liked the way that we could create a centralised based ‘gold standard’ desktop image for everyone and that the patching, application updates and data backup would take place silently in the background without the user even knowing,” continues Mackcracken.

### Transformation Process

Virgin Trains worked on the project with long-term partner and VMware Enterprise Solutions Partner, Spherica, who identified the solution and were responsible for its implementation.

The project started with a discovery exercise which revealed 200 live applications. Through careful examination these were rationalised to 130 business-critical applications.

Having also identified which applications were required for each of the user groups, Spherica was able to work with Virgin Trains to create the base image for the environment, built around Windows 7. Applications were packaged and tested for delivery through VMware Mirage and each image was then personalised based on the user’s machine.

Desk-to-desk data transfer enabled all local data to be copied from users’ old machines to ensure no data was lost during migration.

“The great thing about the VMware Mirage solution was that there were no issues surrounding user acceptance. Besides getting used to Windows 7, and enjoying improved boot up and shut down times, their experience stayed the same. All of the other IT functionality we delivered was completely invisible and didn’t affect system performance,” enthused Mackcracken.

### Business Benefits

Virgin Trains successfully made the migration from to Windows 7 ahead of time thanks to Spherica and VMware Mirage. Every machine now boots up within three minutes, thanks to a thinner desktop image, bolstering the business with over 300 hours of productivity every day, which means more time available for Virgin Trains’ staff to deliver exceptional customer service.

Likewise, local data, applications, settings and preferences on machines are backed up hourly, and can be restored in as little as two hours in the event of failure, something that would have taken several days previously. New applications can be delivered in a fraction of the time too. The SLA for getting new applications into the environment is now five days whereas once it would take four to six weeks. A critical improvement that is allowing Virgin Trains to trial new applications and meet compelling demands of the business at short notice.

### Next Steps

At the heart of Virgin Trains’ IT strategy is a desire to be agile and innovative in supporting business demands. The fact that VMware Mirage has transformed how its IT team is able to run and manage its end-user computing environment means the IT team now has the capacity to evaluate how else they can deliver value for Virgin Trains.

“We see VMware as pivotal in our businesses drive to become more agile in the future,” concludes Mackcracken.

