swisspro Optimizes Mobile Workspace Model with Factory Provisioning

swisspro, a provider of electrical installation, information and communications technology (ICT), and automation services, faced the twofold challenge of digitalization and the rapid implementation of mobile workspaces. The PC lifecycle management (PCLM) solution deployed at swisspro was obsolete and highly inefficient; new hardware was urgently needed. The company made the decision to replace about 600 clients and installed VMware Workspace ONE as a uniform endpoint management (UEM) platform to manage all its devices.

These Windows 10 devices are now preconfigured using Dell Provisioning for VMware Workspace ONE and forwarded directly to end users, the staff, who perform a self-service setup as a final step. Each Windows 10 laptop is ready to use in less than 20 minutes, after which users can work from anywhere. The result? Happier, more productive employees – an aspect that benefits efforts to recruit new talent.

360-degree solutions from a single source

Founded in 1999, swisspro has grown from an initial team of 14 to around 1,100 staff today (including 120 apprentices) across 20 offices throughout Switzerland. swisspro, a subsidiary of Berner Kraftwerke (BKW), is a single-source provider of made-to-measure, end-to-end solutions that comprise consulting, implementation, maintenance and the operation of ICT, automation and electronic/electrical engineering systems for everything from small and medium-sized enterprises to major corporations. The company operates mainly in two industries: the ancillary building trade and unified communication/collaboration. Its customers include numerous large Swiss enterprises in the banking, insurance and
pharmaceutical sectors. As at other companies, the COVID-19 pandemic has played a crucial role in transforming the world of work at swisspro. Because more and more of its staff had to transition to working from home as a result, a suitable infrastructure had to be put in place.

**Legacy solution – Far too long to set up new devices**

The COVID-19 pandemic confronted swisspro with the challenge of sending all its staff to work from home and, hence, ensuring that remote working – including IT – ran smoothly and without complications. Today’s employees expect to be able to work flexibly from anywhere, at any time and from any device. And these demands are equally important in the context of recruiting fresh talent. All of which makes a sophisticated IT infrastructure and smooth-running devices essential. The most challenging aspect for swisspro involved centrally managing all devices and implementing soft clients.

The obsolete PC lifecycle management solution deployed previously took at least four hours to set up a single new device. Vast amounts of time were thus wasted for staff and the IT team alike. Setting up each and every device by hand and then sending them to the relevant staff would have swallowed up a lot of time and money for the IT team.

All the company’s existing devices had to be replaced, primarily due to the substandard customer service provided by the previous device supplier. Since swisspro had four or five different docking stations, shared workplaces – “shareplaces” – were not possible. Also, the number of different device vendors made managing the hardware even more complicated. The team saw time getting away from them: “Every time a device didn’t work properly or was defective, we first had to find out which type it was, load the right driver and so on. The work involved was huge and unnecessary,” shared Reto Marti, Head of Internal IT, swisspro Group.

“Drop Ship” factory provisioning eased the burden on IT

To make remote working easier for staff, the infrastructure was overhauled completely. Thanks to Future Ready Workforce Solutions from VMware, Dell laptops running Windows 10 were rolled out for all clients. swisspro opted for Dell Provisioning for VMware Workspace ONE, which ensures that each device is preconfigured and fitted with the right applications in the factory before they are shipped. The new devices made available by swisspro were then delivered not to the internal IT unit, but directly to the end users – the staff. After receiving their devices, employees authenticated themselves with their email address and password. Devices were up and running within 30 minutes, after which each employee had full access to all corporate resources and was able to work remotely from anywhere. This was the first time an out-of-the-box strategy had ever been applied for a Dell Provisioning for VMware Workspace ONE project anywhere in Europe. The components needed for the hardware were selected in advance and then fitted together in the factory to produce complete laptops in accordance with the prescribed template.

At the same time, swisspro also replaced its deployment system with VMWare Workspace ONE as a modern platform for digital workplaces. Besides accelerating roll-out, VMware Workspace ONE also allowed processes to be outsourced. swisspro currently has about 800 VMware Workspace ONE licenses in the cloud. Each user license can be used to manage five devices (mobile phones, tablets, Windows computers etc.). And swisspro now plans to build upon the comprehensive device health and security measures within Workspace ONE with a zero-trust strategy as the next step.

swisspro has been collaborating with VMware since November 2019. The initial project was sparked off by the company’s internal IT team and one of its apprentices, who had concerned themselves with the subject during their final exams. A total of around 600 clients are to be replaced in gradual steps. The aim is for laptop availability to be restored as quickly as possible if employees encounter problems or if maintenance work is needed: “Under the old system, it took at least four hours to get a PC ready,” Marti notes. “But thanks to VMware, we have cut that to about 30 minutes, which makes life so much easier for the IT team.”

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The VMware Workspace ONE mobile productivity applications used by swisspro include Boxer, Web, Tunnel and Notebook, alongside Windows 10 and Microsoft Office. The company has also put together packages for other Windows applications that are used by at least ten or 20 staff and for which licenses are needed. Each package bears the swisspro brand, which itself enhances the user experience through an increased awareness of the brand. Jevotrust Management AG, VMware’s first Principal Partner in Switzerland, reached Master Service Competency for digital workplaces and is spearheading the project. Jevotrust is overseeing everything from project launch to deployment, including planning, conceptual design, setup, consultation with Dell, deployment of the entire environment, the integration of third-party products, the packaging of all Windows applications, ongoing customer care for swisspro and future support. “We are really pleased to be part of this project and to help advance the mobile workspace model at swisspro,” says Robert Jenni, Managing Director of Jevotrust Management AG.
The faster, lower-cost path to remote working

Shipping devices directly to employees instead of via the IT unit saves time and money on transport costs, but also helps reduce carbon dioxide emissions. In addition, Dell Provisioning for VMware Workspace ONE eases the burden of device configuration for swisspro and gives staff greater independence. Another benefit is the no-gaps customer service provided by Dell, wherever the customer or end customer happens to be. VMware Workspace ONE allows all endpoints to be centrally managed via a console, where all devices, users and applications are clearly visible at a glance. For apprentices, one key benefit is that they no longer have to familiarize themselves with all kinds of different tools. Instead, they only work with a single, central platform. The onboarding process for new recruits too is therefore faster and simpler.

Compared to their legacy PCLM solution, Workspace ONE now supports a cloud-based modern management approach for their Windows 10 devices – including being able to remotely deliver policies, OS patches, apps, and security settings – so the devices remain always-up-to-date and compliant. swisspro’s recent move into the cloud has also made it fully independent of any given VPN tool. Staff can go about their work with complete independence of location or network, working with their swisspro device from any place at any time. The advantage is that, if one device experiences problems, staff can simply switch to a different device and continue working with access to the same consistent data. IT experts can perform remote maintenance and troubleshooting, creating a win-win situation for both the IT team and the staff. Thanks to the VMware Workspace ONE App Catalog, applications can immediately be downloaded to new devices, again avoiding any extra cost to swisspro’s IT team. “Who wants to spend the whole day formatting and reconfiguring computers? Nobody!” Marti smiles. “The important thing is equipping staff with the right applications to let them get on with their work, simply and efficiently.”

Thanks to VMware Future Ready Workforce Solutions, swisspro is well placed to deal with crisis and pandemics and, if necessary, send all their employees to work remotely. On the one hand, staff can now set up their own devices and work more productively, all of which improves job satisfaction. On the other hand, the IT team are free to devote their time to more value-add activities that further advance the digital transformation. Motivation levels are therefore higher on both sides, and the new workspace model has made swisspro even more attractive to new talent. Younger generations attach great importance to flexible working arrangements and a healthy work/life balance – demands that swisspro are now more able to fulfill.

Looking ahead

By the end of November 2020, all staff will have access to VMware Workspace ONE via Dell hardware. VMware Horizon will be implemented at the company in the future. Indeed, swisspro plans to exploit all the benefits afforded by the platform: “I think there is still a lot of mileage in this versatile platform,” Marti notes. “VMware Workspace ONE is a very modern tool that opens up all kinds of possibilities.” The IT chief is equally convinced that further data center projects can be pursued as well. He and the whole IT department at swisspro are delighted: “The project with VMware, Dell and Jevotrust is a flagship project. And there is so much more we still want to do to make remote working as easy and convenient as possible for our people.”

During the pandemic, staff of the @swissprogroup were supplied with new laptops. Thanks to Dell Provisioning for @VMware #WorkspaceONE, the devices are preconfigured and shipped straight to employees. #VMware