

White Paper

VMware View Branch Office Desktop

Improving IT Control and the User Experience

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Introduction

Employees located in remote and branch offices (ROBOs) often struggle to obtain reliable and predictable access to corporate applications, while IT grapples with cost-efficiently managing applications, maintaining data security, and limiting the IT staff required to support ROBOs. Businesses with ROBO locations have solved these problems by virtualizing the desktop environment with [VMware View](#). ESG recently spoke with several customers about their success with VMware View’s solution to optimize the delivery of a branch office desktop.

Background

From retail stores to banks, health care practices to travel agencies, organizations in every industry depend on branch offices to deliver localized services to customers. It is often challenging, however, for IT to deliver effective localized services to users working in those branch offices. Many ROBOs have no onsite IT staff and depend on administrative personnel to handle IT tasks (with mixed results). At other ROBOs, central IT staff may have to travel to the branch to fix a problem, taking time and generating expense. It is difficult for IT to control and manage applications and data, ensure compliance with corporate and regulatory requirements, safeguard information, and meet the individual support needs of every user.

ESG recently asked respondents currently using desktop virtualization about the top benefits of deploying virtual desktops over the WAN to ROBO locations. The top three responses, shown in Figure 1, include an improved ability to perform application upgrades and maintenance (51%), enhanced data protection (backup, recovery, etc.) (42%), and improved application accessibility and reliability (35%).¹ Simply put, by deploying applications via virtualized desktops, organizations were able to improve efficiencies and deliver higher levels of service to ROBO employees. Other benefits of note included lower IT costs at the ROBO (31%), better security of applications and associated data (30%), and improved regulatory compliance (20%).

Figure 1. Benefits of Delivering Desktop Virtualization Over the WAN to ROBO Locations



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, 2012.

¹ Source: ESG Research Brief, [Delivering Virtual Desktops to Remote Office/Branch Office Users](#), May 2012.

Notably, desktop virtualization is high on the list of ways to make these improvements. While 23% of surveyed organizations were already virtualizing desktops, another 32% were planning to implement desktop virtualization specifically to improve branch office IT service delivery—in fact, desktop virtualization was the second most commonly cited strategy, after upgrading network equipment.²

VMware View Branch Office Desktop

VMware View enables desktops to be delivered from a central location, enabling a consistent and reliable desktop experience for users located in a ROBO. It offers IT the ability to deliver a productive desktop environment across a WAN with PCoIP, and it simplifies and speeds provisioning to maximize both end-user and IT productivity. A common benefit is a significant reduction in desktop operating costs due to reducing IT staff members' travel to remote sites to apply patches and upgrades, the ability to use thin or zero clients, and better management of the desktop environment. In addition, VMware vSphere features such as high availability, disaster recovery, and business continuity can be extended to the branch office locations to maximize data protection and productivity. The View solution includes modules for desktop delivery and management, authentication and customization, monitoring and troubleshooting, and security. It can be remotely managed from servers located either at the branch office or in a central data center.

Customers Gain Competitive Advantage with VMware View

HBF Health Limited Improves Performance and Efficiency with VMware View

HBF is a not-for-profit health insurance company serving 900,000 members in Western Australia. The company's 800 employees are located in branches throughout the state. ESG spoke with John Loiacono, Project Manager for the VMware View rollout, as well as with consultants Stephen Webb and Eric Wong, who were responsible for deployment.

HBF was ready to replace an aging fleet of desktop PCs with no common platform when IT decided to investigate desktop virtualization. The company's physical desktops were not up to the performance needs of users or the efficiency requirements of IT; breakdowns and replacements were driving up both equipment and management costs. With a successful VMware server virtualization implementation already improving performance, reliability, and redundancy, evaluating View was a natural progression.

"The users provided the main feedback to really win management over, and management came back to us asking, 'How fast can you roll this out?'"

—Eric Wong, Systems Specialist

The company's desktops are now delivered via PCoIP over a 1Gb connection. HBF currently has 200 desktops on each Intel Nehalem-based View server. After a successful pilot program with 100 users, the benefits were clear. In addition, those 100 users quickly became champions of the technology. IT staff spent time with users to make the transition very easy, and that effort resulted in quick acceptance.

² Source: ESG Research Report, [Remote Office/Branch Office Technology Trends](#), July 2011.

“VMware View added to the success of server virtualization creating an environment in which flexibility and business continuity are very real, allowing us to easily adopt IT-as-a-service or cloud computing. The associated advantages give our business the agility to make decisions that help keep us competitive in the market.”

—Eric Wong, Systems Specialist

Results and Future Plans

Replacing the old fleet of PCs with virtual desktops on thin clients has resulted in 4x to 5x faster performance. It also is supporting “green” energy initiatives. HBF was able to create a service-oriented architecture and bring governance and structure along with virtualization into the desktop implementation. The same desktop is used for 90% of employees, who need only a browser and Microsoft Office applications. Two images serve 95% of the population, with the last 5% needing just an additional finance application. Desktop support calls have dropped dramatically, and when calls do come in, problems are much simpler to diagnose because the desktops are standardized. Some executives are even accessing their desktops on tablet computers.

Mobile endpoints are next on the list—for users such as hospital liaisons who visit members when they are in-patients. And HBF is looking at the VMware Horizon Application Manager as a possible future deployment.

“VMware has an aggressive roadmap, and we always find useful new functionality in its patches, so we make sure to stay up to date. Also, VMware’s technical and aftermarket support are one of its biggest selling points.”

—Eric Wong, Systems Specialist

DER Deutsches Reisebüro GmbH & Co. OHG

DER, part of the REWE Group, is the largest travel agency in Germany. Headquartered in Frankfurt, DER’s employees are spread out among 580 branches providing leisure and business travel services. Today, 2,300 desktops are distributed in offices that support up to 15 employees each. ESG spoke with Systems Engineer Sascha Karbginski.

DER’s virtualization project in branch offices began in 2008, with 2,000 physical point-of-sale desktops on four-generation-old PC hardware. Bandwidth was minimal in the branches, and there were no backups of desktop clients. The recovery time for a hardware defect was, at a minimum, 24 hours. IT had no control of desktops, and software updates were running randomly during business hours—leaving employees suddenly without system access at inopportune times. DER was looking for IT control, sustainability improvements and energy savings, and extension of the hardware lifecycle.

“Our vision was to work with a standardized desktop infrastructure and get control of decentralized IT. We wanted to bring branch office problems into our headquarters so we could fix them.”

—Sascha Karbginski, Systems Engineer

Using zero clients instead of PCs, DER now delivers desktops as a service from the central data center to 95% of users. It has upgraded its server, network, storage, and VPN resources and uses PCoIP to connect the data center

with branch offices. About 60 desktops are hosted per server. DER also supports a few home offices with Mac OS and Android tablets using the VMware secure gateway with a SecureID token.

Results and Future Plans

At the initial rollout, users immediately noticed their business-critical travel application ran faster. DER's three-person IT department now manages and maintains the desktop environment across the company, relieving branch offices of any desktop tasks. Software updates are scheduled for off hours, help desk costs have dropped 50%, and DER is achieving 80% energy savings. Should a zero client fail, IT staff members no longer have to travel to the branch—DER has offloaded that task to a service provider who delivers a new client, plugs it in, and reconnects to the desktop with no reconfiguration.

"It's beautiful now. We have control over desktops and can run software updates at night in the data center, so users have more time to work."

—Sascha Karbginski, Systems Engineer

The next step is to complete 100% desktop virtualization. After that, DER is looking at VMware Horizon Mobile as a possibility to manage, provision, and secure more mobile devices. These alternate endpoints are presenting the same situation that desktops had—the devices are configured by IT, but once they leave the headquarters, they are out of IT's control.

Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia (RACWA)

The Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia (RACWA) provides insurance and travel assistance to 720,000 members. Its headquarters is in Perth, and more than 20 branch offices in the region are staffed by 1,300 employees and 100 contractors. ESG contacted System Administrator Nathan Currie, who served as technical lead for the desktop upgrade project across the organization.

For RACWA's IT staff, it was clear that desktop technologies were changing at a much greater rate than in previous years. That created a challenge for them to keep up with technology innovations while maintaining alignment with the company's IT strategies.

RACWA completed pilot implementations of both Windows 7 and VMware View 4.6 with 200 staff members in March 2011. Following those successful programs, VMware View 5.0 was implemented for internal and external access. More than 80 instances of View are available, with more than 200 concurrent sessions across the VMware View virtual desktop platforms. Currie indicated that most users prefer View. About 10% of the total endpoint devices have been virtualized to date, but within two years Currie expects to be 100% virtualized. While most endpoint devices are desktop machines, they also support laptops, thin clients, smartphones, and tablets.

"From an IT perspective we find the platform is robust, scalable, and easy to manage from a centralized console."

—Nathan Currie, System Administrator

Results and Future Plans

Currie raved about the benefits RACWA is enjoying with VMware View—in particular, lower costs. Cost reduction is coming from several areas: support costs are lower due to fewer hardware failures, OS rebuilds, and application deployments; hardware costs are lower due to centralization of branch servers; energy costs have diminished from using thin/zero clients; and technical staffing costs are reduced because desktop management has been dramatically simplified. In addition, the workforce enjoys greater flexibility as they can work from any location at any time.

In addition, the virtual desktop environment has enabled RACWA to provide access to internal development networks for vendors in Israel and India while maintaining security and productivity.

“RACWA has been able to demonstrate that desktop virtualization can provide cost savings, that when extrapolated over a 5-7 year lifecycle, provide a much better return on investment than a traditional desktop lifecycle.”

—*Nathan Currie, System Administrator*

The next priority for RACWA will be deploying desktop virtualization wherever possible across all branches. This initiative will be combined with legacy system replacement and branch office upgrades.

The Bigger Truth

One of IT's greatest struggles centers on the efficient and effective delivery of IT services to remote and branch offices. Branch offices are often used to provide localized services to customers, to expand market reach, and to accommodate employees without the disruption and expense of travel or relocation. However, with IT centralized in a headquarters data center, providing application and data access, good performance, reliable backup, and end-user support to ROBOs is complex and expensive. Keeping data secure across individual desktops is difficult and time consuming, and policies are not easy to enforce.

VMware View serves three important purposes:

1. It enables IT to take control of the desktop environments to ensure performance, availability, protection, security, and compliance.
2. It improves the user experience, resulting in greater productivity.
3. It offers the opportunity to reduce hardware, operational, and energy costs. At many organizations, a desktop refresh cycle provides a good opportunity to switch out physical desktops for virtual ones.

The customers ESG spoke with experienced tangible improvements using VMware View. HBF Health not only improved performance by 5x while reducing energy and support costs, but it also realized that the combination of VMware server and desktop virtualization created an agile business environment that improves HBF's competitive status. DER brought control of 2,300 desktops into central IT, dramatically improving operations in 580 branch locations as well as reducing costs.

RACWA was able to maintain pace with a rapidly changing desktop environment and a Windows 7 migration by adopting VMware View. Benefits were bountiful as RACWA quickly recognized benefits ranging from cost reduction to simplified management. Simply making for an easier environment to manage and a more productive environment for its end users.



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