Death To VDI. Or DaaS. Or Whatever It's Called This Week

NOV 6, 2013 @ 11:31 AM   **9,099** VIEWS

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FULL BIO ⌄

I was contacted the other day to comment on the news that the Government of New Zealand has

created a short list of vendors to supply Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) on a whole-of-Government basis. I guess considering New Zealand is where the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit movies were filmed one could be excused for expecting us to be a few hundred years behind the times but nonetheless this news was less that awe-inspiring. With breathtaking excitement, the CIO of the New Zealand Government (and, as an aside, technology role within government? Perhaps the most stereotypically boring combination ever) told of the benefits that Desktop as a Service (DaaS) could bring:

> " DaaS will help make government workplaces more flexible by enabling people to access their own desktop from different locations, rather than being tied to their own computer. This will make a big difference to the ability of government agencies to work together to deliver better public services

Sigh…. Where to start on this one?

Proponents of the "VDI is the future" (and there are many, big name vendors such as Citrix, Microsoft `MSFT -2.17%` , VMware `VMW -11.43%` and Fujitsu `FJTSY +%` enjoy lucrative VDI contracts) viewpoint like to remind us that as employees use mobile devices and various form factors (tablet, phone, laptop), having a way to deliver their existing desktop experience
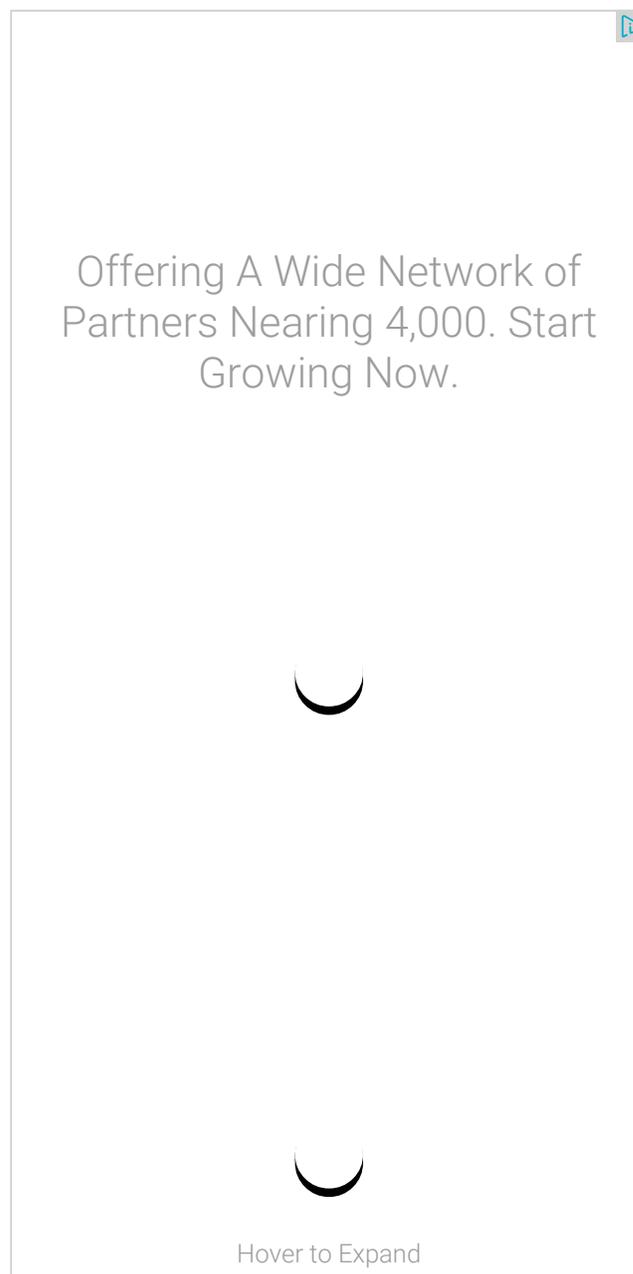
across devices is ever more critical. VDI enables that by wrapping their desktop in a way that allows it to be delivered across all devices. Job done, right?

Well not quite, you see what people who understand business and social trends like to remind us of is that data access and use is highly contextual. How I relate to the applications I have on my various devices is different to how others within my organization do so. Modern development approaches take this into account and rather than shoehorning a monolithic application across different devices, it rather looks at application usage from a results-based paradigm. Instead of "here's the application, go to it" the approach is more one of "what does this particular type of user actually want to achieve when they use this application with a mobile, with a tablet, on a laptop? How do we best deliver on that aim?". Two very different approaches indeed. And VDI delivers nothing for this modern approach to application interaction. As I said in my comment on the post,:

> " Desktop as a Service is lat year's solution to last decade's problem. In this day of mobile devices and myriad form factors, trying to shoehorn applications onto a device with a virtual desktop is just stupid. People want to be able to use

discrete applications on their device –
these applications are delivered in a way
that is in keeping with the form factor of
the device – delivering software
designed for desktops onto a mobile
device makes little sense. Sure DaaS
might take out government agencies
from the 70's to the 80's, but it does
little more than that.

The other bizarre thing that people
forget in the race to deploy VDI is that
it solves few actual problems.
Commenting on the deal MacDonald
said that:

> ❝ …This means agencies don't have to
> buy, build, install and operate computer
> hardware and software. Instead they can
> purchase it as a service and access it
> through the Internet, paying only for
> what they use, like a utility. Agencies can
> scale up or down as it suits them

Baloney! Agencies still have to buy the
devices that will run the virtual
desktop – sure they don't have to walk
around with DVDs installing updates
on lots o different devices but that
problem has been solved in modern
mobile applications – all those

background app updates that happen
on your Android or iOS (oh and
Windows Mobile and Blackberry for
the half dozen of you who use them)?
They're all automatic – no IT
involvement needed! Interestingly an
article from a couple of years ago on
the subject of VDI found that the
benefits espoused are often illusory.
From the article:

> What's wrong with VDI? Well, first of all,
> the hardware involved costs 40-80%
> more than just replacing a desktop with
> a new one. The economics of PCs are so
> well trodden that it's difficult for any
> other hardware configuration to deliver
> as much value at the same price. Then,
> there's the question of service level.
> When one desktop goes down, a single
> worker (two, if you count the deskside IT
> help) becomes nonproductive. But if
> there's a glitch at the server end, 10,000
> workers could be down for an unknown
> period of time. Building in redundancy
> might be a solution, but then VDI costs
> 100-200% more than the simple PC
> alternative.

In commenting on some news about
VMware's VDI offering, Wikibon
Analyst Stu Miniman stated that:

> the biggest barriers to VDI adoption are
> cost, performance, the management
> complexity associated with maintaining
> user experience, and the operational
> disruptions that can be caused by
> changing infrastructure

Or in other words, it sucks and totally

isn't worth doing. Fundamentally CIOs need to stop thinking about new form factors as an evil that they grudgingly have to find ways to support and instead view the device landscape as a chance to take a fresh look at applications. Think of your core systems of record as central hubs to which a plethora of different applications can talk. Enable your workers to use different applications depending on their particular situation. Celebrate the fact that with modern development tools and Application Programming Interface (API) platforms, it is easier than ever before to create lightweight applications that "talk" to core systems. VDI doesn't do any of that, it's a solutions looking for an answer and the real concern is that by going down the VDI path, organizations miss out on the real opportunities that exist.

Ben Kepes is a technology evangelist, an investor, a commentator and a business adviser. Ben covers the convergence of technology, mobile, ubiquity and agility, all enabled by the Cloud. His areas of interest extend to enterprise software, software integration, financial/accounting software, platforms and infrastructure as well as articulating technology simply for everyday users. Read more about Ben here.

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