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Desktop as a Service cost and scalability are its chief advantages

By Gabe Knuth

Hosting virtual desktops in the cloud has become more popular and viable these days, so what are the main advantages of this approach to desktop management?

Desktop as a Service (DaaS) is such a hot topic that Brian Madden and I are writing a book about it, so its [pros and cons](#) have been on my mind a lot lately. Each of the following advantages of DaaS is in addition to the typical benefits of virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), such as allowing your users to work from anywhere, centralized desktop management and great performance even on not-so-great client devices. I'll get to the disadvantages in the next part of this two-part series.

The provider knows VDI, so you don't have to

DaaS is essentially VDI that you pay someone else to manage (though the [actual definition of DaaS](#) is slightly more complicated), so one of the biggest advantages is that you don't have to know VDI to get the same benefits. The nature of the business is to separate you, the company with the end users, from the plumbing that ties together the plethora of components that make up DaaS.

If it all blows up, at least you're not sitting on hardware that you're no longer going to use for VDI.

That means you don't need to have anyone on staff that's familiar with the nuances of desktop storage optimization or image management, for example. You don't need to convince your network security department that poking a hole back into your data center for users to connect to their desktops from unmanaged clients is the best idea ever. And, you don't have to worry about unexpected bottlenecks appearing at some magical tipping point when you [begin to scale up](#).

Incremental scaling

While we're on the subject of scaling, one of my favorite benefits of DaaS is that the scaling is incremental in either direction. If you need more, you simply provision one more desktop. Sure, on most days adding a single user to a [VDI environment](#) is OK, but how many "single users" can you add before you put yourself at risk? There's eventually going to be a point where this incremental method has you in a situation where your reserve capacity isn't enough to shoulder the load if a host goes down or you experience an extremely high peak period of use.

The same holds true for de-provisioning users from the system. If you have a VDI environment and want to de-provision a single user, that's not such a big deal. But if you remove many users, you're left with unused capacity in your now-overbuilt and even higher-cost-per-user environment.

Desktop as a Service cost is fairly predictable

Another aspect that's appealing is that Desktop as a Service costs are relatively predictable. Base desktops cost in the neighborhood of \$30 to \$35 per month per user. I can hear the infomercial now: "For

around a dollar per day, you too can sponsor a desktop in the cloud."

More on DaaS benefits

Advantages of [cloud-hosted desktops](#)

How are [VDI and DaaS](#) different?

[FAQ](#) on Desktop as a Service

Now, depending on what other services you sign up for or place at the [DaaS provider](#) -- for example, user environment management, image creation, layering or even local file storage -- that price can change. But the end result is still a predictable per-user cost.

The version of Windows also factors into the price, because if you want to use Windows 7, you'll have to add additional license costs (it all goes back to the [lack of an SPLA for Windows 7](#)), whereas if you use Windows Server as the "desktop" OS, the license is included in the cost.

Keep in mind that I'm only talking about the DaaS subscription. There are likely other things you have to do in your environment to make DaaS happen, such as adding Internet bandwidth and setting up VPNs -- which all have their own costs -- but it's still more predictable than VDI.

DaaS pilots are easy

All of these points come together to make DaaS pilots very easy. You don't have to go through all the effort of planning out your strategy for hardware and the VDI platform itself. You know exactly what Desktop as a Service is going to cost.

Plus, you can scale up and down as needed in the pilot without biting off more than you can chew. If it all blows up, financially you're out whatever the subscription fees were, but at least you're not sitting on top of a pile of hardware that you're no longer [going to use for VDI](#). More importantly, you're not going to get caught in the situation that so many companies face when they build a functional VDI platform on a hardware foundation that only works during the pilot but falls apart at scale.

Still, there are some shortcomings of DaaS that don't have easy answers, which I'll get to in the next part of the series.

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