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Desktop as a Service options increase on demand for cloud services

By Bridget Botelho

Companies that want to deliver virtual desktops but haven't been able to get a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) pilot off the ground -- or simply don't want to invest in more infrastructure -- see [Desktop as a Service](#) as a viable -- if not better -- alternative.

National Asset Direct Inc. (NAD), a national debt management firm, moved from terminal servers and thin clients to a [hosted desktop model](#) to provide its employees -- many of whom need remote access to desktops -- with a better experience.

"We considered doing VDI in-house but once you look at the up-front capital cost, it didn't make sense for a company of our size," said John Madrid, NAD's chief technology officer.

NAD moved 200 Windows 7 desktops to dinCloud's Hosted Virtual Desktop platform two years ago. It reduced its server infrastructure from 50 to 30 boxes, so the IT team has a lighter infrastructure to maintain. The team also benefits from always having access to the most up-to-date hardware and software without putting up the Capex to get it.

"For a nominal up-front cost, we can leverage what another company has already built," Madrid said.

Indeed, many Desktop as a Service users land in the cloud because [their VDI efforts failed](#), said David Gilon, director of product management at DeskTone Inc., a Lexington, Mass.-based [DaaS platform provider](#).

"The [proof of concept] works fine but when they scale up, and have to manage the hardware, networking and storage themselves, they realize it takes specialized expertise that mid- and small-sized organizations don't have," he said.

People like Madrid also [move to DaaS](#) because they don't want to manage all that stuff.

"They just want to manage images and provision desktops to end users," Gilon said. "They want it to be somebody else's problem, and they want it to be cheaper than what they are doing today."

Those reasons are likely behind the uptick in [interest in DaaS](#) -- albeit a very small one in a niche market. Just over 6% of the 1,200 respondents to TechTarget's 2013 Cloud Pulse Survey said they use DaaS now, but 15% said they might use it later this year. In 2012, 5% of respondents said they used DaaS and 14% planned to use it later in the year.

One IT services provider said he has noticed a [boost in interest in DaaS](#) and an overall trend toward cloud migration. Part of the reason is an increasingly mobile workforce and the bring your own device, or BYOD, trend, said Herb Hogue, senior vice president for professional services and engineering at En Pointe Technologies in Gardena, Calif.

"It is more important than ever for organizations to support their end users in a variety of use case scenarios," he said. "The [DaaS model](#) also allows for more control and security of sensitive information

and applications. [It] enables a company to be more nimble."

The [main benefits of DaaS](#), Hogue said, are increased flexibility for remote workers and up-front infrastructure savings.

"[Companies that decide to employ DaaS](#) also can preserve their cash or capital expenditures and pay on a flexible subscription model," he said.

Desktop as a Service flavors

With [DaaS demand on the rise](#), many virtual desktop software vendors offer cloud-hosted versions of their platforms -- which gives IT shops plenty of DaaS options to choose from.

Citrix Systems Inc. has adapted its desktop and app delivery models to meet [market demand for cloud-based desktops](#) and apps. Citrix retooled and simplified its code base last year so that hosting providers can deliver its XenDesktop and XenApp [as a cloud service](#), according to Ken Oestreich, a spokesperson for the vendor's Desktops and Apps.

In addition, Citrix's Excalibur tech preview, released in November, allows administrators to deliver VDI desktops and apps from a [Windows Server 2012](#) hosted shared desktop. Using the [Excalibur platform](#), enterprise customers can do their usual user and app provisioning, but the desktops and apps are deployed from a public cloud, a private cloud or a traditional on-premises server environment.

"You could have XenDesktop on an internal server for certain worker groups and on a cloud platform for others, and deliver the software as a service," Oestreich said. "IT becomes their own Software as a Service provider."

There are other options besides Citrix's platform and those from Desktone and dinCloud. Virtual Bridges Inc. launched a cloud-based version of its VERDE virtual desktop in early March. It now offers on-premises, hosted and hybrid desktop delivery models. A more mature option is TuCloud, which has a number of major customers, including Lawrence Livermore Labs, UCLA and the U.S. Department of Energy.

VMware Inc. also offers its View platform as DaaS via public providers or through private clouds with [Horizon View](#). One version of the latter, called VMware Horizon View Business Process Desktop, is used for call center agents, back-office employees, developers and home-based agents.

In part two of this story, learn about the [pros, cons and costs of DaaS](#).

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