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VDI vs. DaaS: How are cloud-hosted desktops different?

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When it comes to virtual desktop infrastructure, administrators have a lot of choices. You may have wondered about the differences between VDI software options, remote display protocols or all the licenses out there. In this series, we tackle some of the biggest head-scratchers facing VDI admins to help you get things straight.

If you've deployed virtual desktops, you probably have them hosted in your data center. But as trust in cloud services grows, there's also the possibility of [hosting desktops in the cloud](#).

Known as [Desktop as a Service](#) (DaaS), this approach allows IT to outsource virtual desktops to a cloud service provider. You probably assume that DaaS and virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) are very different, but they actually share most of the same benefits: simpler desktop management, less hardware and increased flexibility and mobility. Desktop as a Service has [its own challenges](#), though, including security, licensing and data control.

With a lot of similarities and differences, it's difficult to [choose between data center-hosted and cloud-hosted desktops](#). To help you decide, let's get this straight:

Points for Desktop as a Service

DaaS takes infrastructure out of IT's hands

One of the main differences between VDI and DaaS is that with cloud-hosted desktops, IT doesn't have to worry about all the technology going on in the background. The provider takes care of resource provisioning, load balancing and network issues, for instance. However, IT still needs to [manage its virtual desktops](#), applications and clients, and pay attention to the remote desktop protocol.

Series: Let's get this straight

Clearing up [Microsoft VDI licensing](#): SA vs. VDA vs. CDL

[Application virtualization](#) comparison

Comparing [remote display protocols](#)

Cloud-based apps affect VDI adoption

Cloud services are enticing for the business side because they can decrease up-front infrastructure costs when compared to VDI. Plus, cloud-hosted desktops make sense if your organization already relies on [Web-based applications](#). Still, IT admins like the centralized management, data center security and control over performance that VDI provides.

Cloud-hosted desktops can cut costs, complexity

If you don't want to manage endpoints or back-end infrastructure, [DaaS may be the right choice](#) -- especially if your company doesn't have in-house VDI expertise. [Cloud-hosted desktops](#) cut down on PC

costs and may be faster because they're not behind a firewall. Still, these desktops are delivered over a remote connection, so some additional latency comes into play.

Weighing DaaS vs. VDI: What's right for you?

Since cloud-hosted desktops aren't connected to servers in your data center, they're easier to move, patch, upgrade and restore when a failure happens. Plus, a cloud deployment is [more flexible than VDI](#) -- your provider can quickly spin up desktops to users on any device. Even network concerns are often unwarranted, because cloud-hosted desktops are connected to the corporate environment through a private connection.

How VDI trumps DaaS

Connectivity, trust present DaaS challenges

Despite the benefits, there are reasons to be wary of cloud-hosted desktops. Trust is a major issue for many organizations [considering Desktop as a Service](#), because IT doesn't have the same control over data that it does in a VDI environment. Connectivity and reliability are other issues, as recent outages in the industry have shown. Finally, consider whether your provider can keep your data secure.

Cloud-hosted desktop licensing remains unclear

One of the major differences between VDI and DaaS is the issue of licensing. In many environments, the cloud provider can provide a service level agreement (SLA), but the organization needs its own Windows licenses per user. Plus, [Microsoft doesn't yet offer a Service Provider License Agreement](#) for Windows 7, making it tricky for [DaaS providers to offer Windows](#) virtual desktop environments at a lower cost.

Of course, that's not to say [VDI licensing](#) is any easier: You still need Software Assurance and numerous other licenses.

Five questions to ask a DaaS provider

Another main difference between VDI and DaaS is that you have to choose a provider for [cloud-hosted virtual desktops](#).

Before you [commit to a DaaS provider](#), make sure its [SLA](#) provides compensation for outages and determine what happens during an Internet failure. Check for USB support, printer redirection and other hardware compatibility needs. Also consider where the provider stores user profiles and whether it uses mandatory profiles that you can't customize.

DaaS difficulties: User customization

With [cloud-hosted desktops in the hands of a provider](#), it's harder to [personalize the end-user environment](#). With VDI, admins can customize virtual desktop configurations and personalize users' endpoints -- to a certain degree. Another consideration is resource sharing: Both VDI and DaaS often have virtual desktops competing for resources, so make sure your system has some extra load available.

Considering data ownership, compliance, costs

If a cloud provider has control over your data, who owns that data and makes the final decision on how to manage it? As you consider that, also make sure the [DaaS provider](#) stays in compliance with licensing and technical regulations. If you aren't schooled on these and other [issues with cloud-hosted desktops](#), you might incur an additional cost: outside consultants or advisors.

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