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The Skinny on Thin Client Computing

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Times change quickly. Just a few months ago, Thin Client computing meant thin PC's. But today, thin client computing means more than just the device - now it's all about managing your applications in the simplest, most straightforward way possible, while extending your resources through the use of server-based computing.

Most healthcare organizations have staff working out of home offices, healthcare facilities, clinics, and remote locations, at all hours of the day and night. The challenge for the IT Professional is to provide secure, reliable, universal access to medical and enterprise applications regardless of the hardware used, the physical location or the connection methods.

Server-based computing maybe the answer: deployed in business networks since the mid 90's and typically used as a single server to address individual remote computing needs, server based computing quickly evolved into multi-server implementations used by all kinds of small to medium organizations. The benefits proved substantial and the technology grew so quickly that it is now used to support multiple enterprise-class applications across organizations worldwide. The technology uses application delivery solutions like Citrix's Metaframe, Microsoft's Terminal Server and Genuit's Thinworx to allow the use of applications (ERP, CRM productivity tools such as Office and various types of Health Information Systems) beyond the confines of the healthcare institution (home or other remote locations) and beyond the capabilities of the client workstation.

The Tolly Group, an independent test lab, completed an analysis of the three most common computing models:

- Client server (traditional desktop)
- Thin client (thin client stations - hardware only)
- Server based computing using a Thin Client Utility Application

They found that the Client Server model contained inherent financial and resource issues including updating and distributing applications to every client. Providing remote support was difficult and often involved emulation software or customization to be able to provide the level of service required. This model proved to be time consuming, expensive and difficult to maintain.

The Thin Client hardware model didn't fare much better. Contrary to popular belief, thin client devices delivered low cost savings due to the narrowing cost differential between thin client stations and full function PCs.

Microsoft has endorsed Server based computing by including Terminal Services in all server versions of Windows 2000, which enables applications on networked servers to be deployed, accessed

and managed centrally.

Industries that are driving thin client computing span not only healthcare but a variety of other markets including, retail (POS), education (computer labs, remote courseware), manufacturing and banking (legacy financial applications). Application Service Providers (ASPs) also look to server based computing for deployment of their hosted applications. Mobile/remote users using low bandwidth links, low performance client PCs or thin terminals are ideal environments to deploy thin client technology.

Server based computing is not without its challenges - a change to Server based computing from a PC or local processing approach may encounter resistance from users who prefer to administer their own applications and there can be no offline work, but the numerous benefits really outweigh the objections. Not convinced? Here are some more reasons to consider server based computing:

Easier Manageability

Applications are centralized on a server or server farm so the administration of installation, updates and support are much more efficient and convenient

Simplicity

Simplicity is provided at the user level and the complexity is administered and controlled by the IT team. Because data is stored centrally, users access consistent, up-to-date information, facilitating enterprise-wide collaboration

Higher Reliability and Productivity

Clients are less likely to experience user application issues, as they are resident and available on one or more servers. It eliminates the need to download large files via the Internet or dial-up Intranet when using a modem

Rapid Deployment

It is significantly faster and easier as deployment is performed only at the server; updates or upgrades are facilitated through the enterprise ensuring consistent and up-to-date services for the entire user community.

Scalability

It can easily align to meet changing IT environments including adding or removing users and applications. It permits sharing of enterprise resources including servers and storage.

Lower TCO/Savings

It reduces installation and support costs due to centralized management, extending the life cycle of legacy equipment and reduces overall total cost of ownership.

Investment Protection

It can extend the lifecycle of legacy equipment from obsolescence and the need to upgrade or replace

Low Bandwidth Remote Access

It can be supported over low bandwidth connections or networks

Security

It optimizes control of data access and reduces the chance for financial loss of costly equipment and data

With experts predicting the industry to double this year and more than multiply six times over by 2003, server based computing will be an attractive approach for healthcare organizations to deploy applications that will be managed, supported and executed completely on the server.

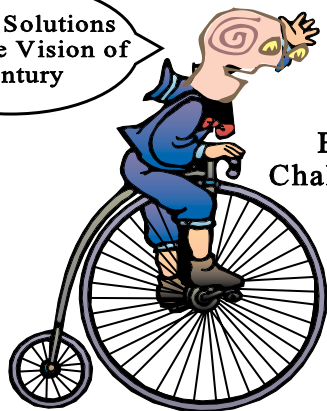
“The Tolly Group determined that the Server based model had the most significant and strategic beneficial impact on an organization.

“As a result, enterprises deploying a thin client solution can achieve a decrease in IT costs from 25 to 65 percent. Although, the implementation of thin client architecture may require a new server(s), existing desktop clients can be used and reduced operating costs more than outweigh new server investments.” The Tolly Group



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