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The benefits of remote IT management

By Bob Tarzey, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

There have been a number of reports recently about the death of the desktop PC, which sits in a fixed office and is deserted every day by the average user at around 5:30pm.

Some reports say that laptop PC sales now exceed those of desktops, and a result of this change may be to help usher in a whole new set of tools to manage IT.

Unsurprisingly, the mobility offered through the use of laptops and smaller mobile computing devices is one of the reasons for the pressure on desktop PC sales. But it is not just mobility that makes laptops attractive. Many low-end models are now as cheap or cheaper than desktops, so it makes sense to buy them anyway even if users are expected to leave them on their desk at the close of business.

Quocirca research has also shown that certain laptop models are now so cheap that they are even being used to support thin client computing, where the user's applications and data are stored and managed centrally in a data centre and accessed using a 'dumb' display device, making them suitable for task-oriented jobs such as those of most call centre agents.

That some of these workers are now using laptop PCs without actually making much use of the machine's processing power or storage capability is a sign of how cheap computing hardware has become.

It is easy to consider these two groups of users - those with their devices in the field and those stuck at their desks - as being opposites in the way they work, and that this affects their support requirements. In fact, much usage actually lies along a spectrum between these two end points, and support services need to reflect this.

When a remote user accesses the network, certain applications and data may be accessible to them only from a centralised source, and

storing data on their device may not be permitted for reasons of integrity and security.

Many remote users are doing task-oriented jobs anyway: field service engineers, parking attendants, clinical staff visiting patients and so on. The sooner the data they gather is centralised the quicker it can be used by other staff. In reality their devices are often akin to thin clients, but accessing centralised resources over wide area connections.

Furthermore, a user who is normally desk-bound can still benefit from having some applications installed on their local PC. It might make sense to allow the ones they use regularly to be cached and run locally for performance reasons, so using laptops as thin clients may not be as wasteful as it first sounds. It also means that, when necessary, they can be mobile too, for example on some occasions needing to work from home.

With so much 'recentralisation' going on, one might think that the job of the IT manager was becoming more straightforward. Far from it. For starters, all those remote devices have to be maintained and managed wherever they are. A single IT management group might be responsible for the devices used in a number of different call centres, as well as the computing requirements of branch and mobile users.

Even the data centre is unlikely to be next door these days, often being located in the custom built and managed premises of a co-location provider with at least one backup data centre elsewhere.

In short, there is rarely one location at which IT managers can place themselves that is proximal to the majority of the assets they have to manage. So system management tools have also had to adapt. The assets are in the cloud, IT managers need to operate in the cloud, and now the management tools they use can be there too.



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Vendors like Citrix Online, NTRglobal and Dell Everdream offer system management as a service, where all the capabilities to carry out management tasks are available on demand wherever the manager and user happen to be.

An important point here is that the data about different devices and users is also available centrally. This means that, with the right permissions, it can be accessed by anyone, so it allows a common management platform to be shared with managed service providers, which may be contracted to carry out day-to-day maintenance tasks, leaving IT managers free to focus on more specialised tasks such as developing and deploying new applications.

An additional benefit of centralised system management platforms shared by many different

organisations is that it allows the aggregation of data about the wider use of IT. While the security and privacy of any individual organisation's data must be guaranteed and respected, it can be anonymised and used by the community in general to determine how many PCs are now running Vista compared to XP, for example, or the take-up of desktop Linux.

Desktop Linux? Perhaps an unfortunate term if the recent reports of the death of the desktop PC are to be believed. Another question that could be answered by mining the data gathered by on-demand system management tools is how many users are still using desktop PCs.

For further details, Quocirca's Remote IT Management briefing is free to vnunet.com readers [here](#).

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at
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