

## IT Analysis – The Road to Vista – Continued...

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Over a year on, and Vista is still being regarded with deep suspicion in the market. Apart from the worries about how many existing PCs can actually run a stack of not only Vista itself, but the applications on top, the main worry is still the lack of application compatibility with the operating system (OS) – even using the many options for previous OS compatibility supplied by Microsoft.

A while back, Quocirca wrote about a company called ChangeBASE, which had developed a partial solution which would take the vast majority of standard installation files (.msi or encapsulated .msi as .exe files) and would “cleanse” these. This removed all the problematic code that tried to provide support for older operating systems, and put in place the bits that were required to ensure that an application would not only install, but also run stably under Vista. Although this bit of magic seemed to work, it was somewhat of a partial solution to a bigger problem in that a lot of older applications were not in .msi installation format, were using older formats of Wise or InstallShield installation routines, or were Microsoft .inf installation scripts. Unfortunately, providing a partial solution to the problem was, in effect, no solution at all, as many of these older applications were the ones which the end users really needed to run under Vista.

Well, the good news is that ChangeBASE has taken this to heart, and the latest version of its product, AOK, now deals with the vast majority of installation types that are to be found in the wild. Along with agreements that have been inked with some of the larger systems integrators and facilities management companies, it looks like ChangeBASE is well positioned going forwards.

After the last article was written, Microsoft contacted Quocirca to say that they also had solutions to the problem – the first being the free tool, Microsoft’s Application Compatibility Toolkit (ACT), and the second being the Microsoft Application Virtualization (MAV) tool, previously known as SoftGrid. ACT, however can only deal with known applications with known compatibility

problems, so will not provide a useful solution for those running bespoke in-house applications, or ones with unknown issues.

MAV, however, is a different approach to the problem. At first, Microsoft positioned MAV as a competitive tool to ChangeBASE AOK, but it has rapidly become apparent that these are synergistic tools that are well suited to those looking at Vista implementations.

MAV is technology that Microsoft picked up from Softricity a couple of years back, and made it available at the beginning of last year under its Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack. This pack, available only under Software Assurance (and Open Value for SMBs) is a set of tools covering a range of technical areas, from asset inventory, through advanced group policy management and error monitoring, diagnostic and recovery tools, to application virtualisation - the last being MAV. Essentially, MAV provides a means of centrally controlling applications, streaming them or provisioning them to a desktop device. Each application can then run in its own virtual space on the desktop/laptop device, utilising the native resources and peripherals of the device. However, MAV does nothing to deal with application compatibility issues itself.

Therefore, as a possible solution to application compatibility, Vista can be installed on the end device, and MAV can be used to create virtual images of those applications that still need XP to run. These images can then be provisioned to virtual XP hosts running under Virtual PC on the host PC. For those under Software Assurance, they will have the capability to run up to four virtual OS images (of an older version than the host OS) on each end device at no extra cost. At a theoretical level, this seems to be a viable solution, but I don’t think that it is essentially elegant, and it will eat up the resources of the end device at a rapid rate. This is a solution similar to running Citrix XenDesktop or VMWare VMWorkstation – all of which have their time and place, but for general usage, unless there are other issues to be taken under consideration, it seems far better here to use ChangeBASE AOK and run the applications natively.

So, where are the synergies? Well, many organisations are now looking for a greater degree of centralised control, and this is really where MAV comes in. MAV cannot, in itself, provide application remediation to get the application to run natively under Vista. ACT can only do so in specific cases. AOK can make the majority of applications install and run under Vista, even if AOK has no prior knowledge of the application. However, AOK has no capability to manage the end result.

Now, if we took the asset discovery component of the Desktop Optimization Pack and ran that to gain a picture of what we already have, ran the applications found through AOK, and then fed back the installation packs created to MAV and using it as a provisioning engine, we have a means of centrally controlling the applications themselves, while running them natively under Vista.

We also have a degree of flexibility in that, where it is deemed necessary, lower capability machines can still have Vista installed, but the applications can be provisioned via Terminal Services, Citrix Presentation Manager (now XenApp), or VMWare Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) so minimising the extra resource utilisation at the end device itself.

So, one of the main hurdles to Vista implementation can be dealt with – even if it requires a greater knowledge of Microsoft's own portfolio than many people at Microsoft itself seem to have, and certainly more than the majority of its partners currently have. It also requires knowledge of what third party offerings are available – and to ensure that, if Microsoft or the channel partner you are dealing with sees these as being competitive products, you can point out that these products are better as complementary products, not as single solutions.

## 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, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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