Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) Implementation

VDI changes more than just infrastructure – it changes the organization

By Bobbie Peters

Today’s Environment
The business benefits of VDI are compelling. From centralized administration, security and performance, to flexibility that can allow users to bring their own devices, VDI offers many quantifiable benefits to IT infrastructure and business users.

More than just the infrastructure changes with a VDI implementation, however. In the early stages, the focus is largely on architecture, design and performance. After the project is underway, the impact to the organization becomes more apparent. Changes to the desktop environment, upgrades to operating systems and enterprise software, and new tools create additional complexity and impact.

Point B’s Perspective
Implementing an enterprise VDI blurs the line between traditional IT data center and desktop infrastructure paradigms and changes the way end users interact with corporate systems. Because rolling out a new desktop environment is visible to each and every IT user, a VDI program is a golden opportunity for IT leaders to build credibility with customers.

In our experience, VDI rollouts most often start as an infrastructure-specific project but seldom end that way. As the opportunities emerge from design sessions, what started out as an IT-centric project grows into a full-fledged program with multiple workstreams that include application development, training, communication, and business teams in addition to infrastructure experts. To be successful, IT leaders need to ask the right questions of their teams and their customers. Defining the program scope and managing the associated change in partnership with business customers and application owners is the key to successful VDI implementation and helps to build strong IT support across the organization.

As part of any VDI implementation planning, we recommend addressing the following questions.

Are our applications compatible with VDI’s technical requirements?
If you’re planning to upgrade the operating system or enterprise applications, such as Microsoft Office or Internet browsers, application owners will need to certify their applications’ compatibility with the new environment. Define the testing and remediation scope early.

How will the new desktop change the user experience?
Even the simplest change to user access or desktop design can trip up day-to-day users and create a surge of calls to the helpdesk. VDI rollouts typically occur
overnight—users walk into the office the day of deployment to find their desktop looks entirely different than the day before! Productivity sags while users acclimate. Recognize that end-user training and communication is essential for success.

**Does our team have the skills and knowledge to manage the new infrastructure?**
Converting to a virtual environment requires new skill sets. To some, that change is daunting. People question whether they can come up-to-speed or if their jobs will change. Change needs to be acknowledged and leaders need to pave the way for technical training and support. Plan and budget training for IT and service desk teams.

**How much change can we adopt at one time?**
It is often tempting when facing an enterprise deployment of VDI to overhaul more than the infrastructure footprint. It’s an opportune time to roll out new features and functions, such as data and e-mail archiving solutions or software upgrades. Carefully consider how much change your team can manage at one time both internally (administration, architecture, design) and externally (training, communications, business impact). Keep in mind that after you deploy VDI, enterprise changes are easier to roll out. Set your team up for success by assessing the change impact ahead of time.

**Have we fully accounted for all the impacts to our desktop environment?**
As you define the business and technical requirements of the project, assess your existing desktop applications and hardware for direct and indirect impacts to your program scope and budget. Have you budgeted to port legacy applications to VDI? How will you handle legacy applications that cannot be ported? Can you extend your desktop lifecycle because performance is now governed by VDI, not by the local client? Will you take advantage of small Thin Client devices to recapture valuable physical desk space? Cast your net broadly to capture all the costs, impacts and opportunities.

**How will Service Level Agreements (SLAs) change with VDI?**
Some organizations find that requirements that were once measured on a per-application or per-business unit basis are no longer applicable to the virtual environment. For example, defining the number of hours that an application may not be available for a specific location per year is no longer relevant if all locations use the same infrastructure. SLAs may need to specify a bank of total minutes that the environment might be unavailable over a given duration of time, rather than on an application-by-application basis. Include negotiations to redefine SLAs in your scope.

**How does VDI impact Disaster Recovery (DR) and Business Continuity (BC) planning?**
One of the benefits to a well-architected VDI solution is the fail-over opportunities built into the design, ideally reducing the impact of confined outages. Take care to distinguish the level of change driven by VDI for DR and BC. In a disaster, whether physical or virtual, systems may not be available. As such, the BC plan may not be different for a VDI environment than it was prior to VDI adoption. Include DR and BC planning in your scope, but carefully assess the change introduced by VDI before changing existing DR/BC plans.

**The Bottom Line**
Making the most of a VDI implementation can have lasting impact on IT relationships across the enterprise. Strong organizational change management distinguishes the most successful VDI rollouts. While vendors and architects contribute to the technical requirements, experienced change management leaders pave the way for business successes.