# VDI, THE NEXT GENERATION OR THE FINAL FRONTIER?

After sitting through a virtualization sales pitch focused around Virtual Desktop Infrastructures (VDI) this afternoon I had several thoughts on the topic I thought may be blog worthy.

VDI has been a constant buzzword for a few years now, riding the coattails of server virtualization. For the majority of those years you can search back and find predictions from the likes of Gartner touting 'This is the year for VDI' or making other similar statements, typically with projected growth rates that don't ever happen. What you won't see is those same analyst organizations reaching back the year after and answering to why they over hyped it, or were blatantly incorrect. (Great idea for a yearly blog here, analyzing previous years failed predictions.) The reasons they've been incorrect vary over the years starting with technical inadequacy of the infrastructures and lack of real understanding as an industry. When VDI first hit the forefront many of us (myself included) made the assumption desktops could be virtualized the same as servers (Windows is Windows right?) What we neglected to account for is the plethora of varying user applications, the difficulty of video and voice, and other factors such as boot storms which are unique and or more amplified within VDI environments than

their server counterparts. From there for a short while the VDI rollout horror stories and memories of failed Proof of Concepts slowed adoption and interest for a short period.

Now we're at a point where the technology can overcome the challenges and the experts are battle hardened with knowledge of success and failures in various environments; yet still adoption is slow. Users are bringing new devices into the workplace and expecting them to interface with enterprise services; yet still adoption is slow. We supposedly have a more demanding influx of younger generation employees who demand remote access from their chosen devices; yet still adoption is slow. This doesn't mean that VDI isn't being adopted, nor that the market share numbers aren't increasing across the board; it's just slow.

The reason for this is that our thinking and capabilities for service delivery have surpassed the need for VDI in many environments. VDI wasn't an end-goal but instead an improvement over individually managed, monitored, and secured local end-user OS environments. The end-goal isn't removing the OS tie to the hardware on the end-point (which is what VDI does) but instead removing the applications tie to the OS; or more simply put: removing any local requirements for access to the services. Starting to sound like cloud?

Cloud is the reason enterprise IT hasn't been diving into VDI head first, the movement to cloud services has shown that for many we may have passed the

point where VDI could show true Return On Investment (ROI) before being obsoleted.  Cloud is about delivering the service to any web connected end-point on-demand regardless of platform (OS.)  If you can push the service to my iOS, Android, Windows, Linux, etc. device without the requirement for a particular OS, then what's the need for VDI?

To use a real world example I am a Microsoft zealot, I use Windows 7, Bing for search and only IE for browsing on my work and personal computers (call me retro.)  I also own an iPad, mainly due to the novelty and the fact that I got addicted to 'Flight Control' on a friends iPad at release of the original.  I occasionally use the iPad for what I'd call 'productivity work' related to my primary role or side projects.  Using my iPad I do things like: Access corporate email for the company I work for and my own, review files, access Salesforce, and Salesforce Chatter, and even perform some remote equipment demos, my files are seamlessly synched between my various other computers.  I do all of this without a Windows 7 virtual desktop running on my iPad, it's all done through apps connected to these services directly.  In fact the only reason I have VDI client applications on my iPad is to demo VDI, not to actually work.

Now an iPad is not a perfect example, I'd never use it for developing content (slides, reports, spreadsheets, etc.) but I do use it for consuming content, email, etc.  To develop I turn to a laptop with full keyboard, screen and some monitor

outputs.  This laptop may be a case for VDI but in reality why?  If the services I use are cloud based, public or private, and the data I utilize is as well, then the OS is irrelevant again.  With office applications moving to the cloud (Microsoft Office 365, Google Docs, etc.) along with many others, and many services and applications already there, what is the need for a VDI infrastructure?

VDI like server virtualization is really a band-aid for an outdated application deployment process which uses local applications tied to a local OS and hardware. Virtualizing the hardware doesn't change that model but can provide benefits such as:

- Centralized control
- Added security
- More efficient backup
- Support staff reduction/repurposing
- Broader device support
- Reduced administrative overhead
- etc.

Once the wound of our current application deployment model has fully healed, the band-aid comes off and we have service delivery from cloud computing environments free of any OS or hardware ties.

**So friends don't let friends virtualize desktops right?**

Not necessarily.  As shown above VDI can have significant advantages over standard desktop deployment.  Those advantages can drive business flexibility and reduce costs.  The difficult questions will become

- Whether your organization can utilize a pure service delivery model based on security needs, organizational readiness, application/service readiness, etc.

- Whether the VDI gains will be seen before the infrastructure can be replaced with a fully service based model

Many organizations will still see benefits from deploying VDI today because the ROI of VDI will occur more quickly than the ability to deliver all business apps as a service.  Additionally VDI is an excellent way to begin getting your feet wet with the concepts of supporting any device with organizational controls and delivering services remotely.  Coupling VDI with things like thin apps will put you one step closer while providing additional flexibility to your IT environment.

When assessing a VDI project you'll want to take a close look at the time it will take your organization to hit ROI with the deployment and assess that against the time it would take to move to a pure service delivery model (if your organization would be capable of such.)  VDI is a fantastic tool in the data center tool bag, but like all others it's not the right tool for every job.  VDI is definitely the Next Generation but it is not The Final Frontier.

Source: http://www.definethecloud.net/vdi-the-next-generation-or-the-final-frontier/