

TOP 10

TOP TEN CONSIDERATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WINDOWS 8 DEPLOYMENT

Windows 8 offers many exciting upgrades and enhancements, and users of older operating systems like Windows Vista and, in particular, Windows XP have no time to waste in their migration. Here are a few suggestions on how to increase the odds of a successful Windows 8 deployment.

As Microsoft rolls out Windows 8 to developers, OEMs, consumers and enterprise IT audiences, there's a lot to be impressed with. Coming just three years after the commercial release of Windows 7, the new operating system has excited the industry with enhanced features such as a refreshed and energized user interface, an upgraded overall user experience, improved security and plenty of bells and whistles for software publishers and corporate developers.

On the face of it, deploying a new operating system may not be the most critical project on IT decision-makers' task lists, but it's clear that migration delays could cause huge economic and operational risks. The biggest driver is that support for Windows XP will be ending in April 2014, making it imperative to move on. In addition, market researcher IDC recently released a report noting that users of five-year-old PCs running Windows XP experience a huge jump in costs in terms of both labor and user productivity. Considering that there still are millions of XP-based systems installed, that represents untold inefficiency that IT organizations simply must address.

Of course, many began making the move to Windows 7 over the past three years. For these ongoing migrations, completion is advised, because the move from Windows 7 to Windows 8 and its successors will be significantly easier than that from Windows XP.

To be clear, there still is a lot of work to be done in ensuring the transition from legacy Windows versions. In fact, IDC points out that, at the end of 2011, the combined installed bases of Windows XP and Vista remained significantly higher than that of Windows 7. So, whether you have XP or Vista running on your systems, you should already be planning and executing your deployment to either Windows 7 or Windows 8. Microsoft acknowledges that migration to a new operating system can take anywhere from 18 to 32 months, from initial planning to full deployment, and the clock is running. That means that now is the time to look at tools that can accelerate and automate the process.

#1. Discover. Assess. Fix. Virtualize. Deploy. Manage.

This is now the fourth new version of Windows brought to market since 2001, so organizations have the benefit of having learned a few key rules about successful deployments, starting with the need to discover what's actually installed on users' systems. The next step is to assess compatibility issues that will sidetrack your deployment, and to fix those issues using any number of well-tailored tools to identify and remediate compatibility problems. After that, be sure to virtualize as much of your operations as possible in order to simplify management and reduce complexity. Now, you're ready to actually deploy across your enterprise – as quickly or as cautiously as your situation and resources allow. Finally, the ongoing management of your applications and systems should be continually monitored for potential glitches and ways to make it easier and less expensive, such as automation.

#2. Expect multiple form factors and platforms among your client systems

Remember how IT organizations fretted a decade or more ago when notebook computers began to outstrip traditional desktops as the form factor of choice for end users? Well, add in new device form factors like netbooks, tablets and smartphones to your Windows 8 deployment plans. Partly because of end-user device experience and partly because of the need to support the "work anywhere" trend, organizations should assume a rapidly growing end-user population that will be leveraging smaller, more mobile form factors – each with its own unique applications footprints, design philosophies and user experiences. Virtualization in one form or another is going to be vital to delivering Windows applications into this new workplace.

#3. Assume BYOD (bring your own device) will be a fact of life for your organization within 18 months – if it's not already.

Certainly, this ties into No. 2 above, but think of this from the standpoint of security and application. Endpoint security and identity management are critical when you're talking about user-owned devices that enter your infrastructure without the same security approaches as company-issued devices. But pay considerable attention to application testing and user experience here, since apps for full-screen desktops and notebooks look and behave a lot differently than do those for even the most cutting-edge smartphones and tablets.

#4. Automation is the core principle for Windows 8 compatibility testing.

Whether you're talking about discovery and testing tools, controlled testing of Web-based applications or creating application virtualization packages, IT organizations need to move aggressively to automate as much as possible. Look for deployment tools designed with extensive automation capabilities as an underlying philosophy, as well as support for such functionality as automated MSI package creation for applications that aren't easily virtualized, and auto-fix packages to resolve compatibility issues.

#5. Look for tools and solutions to lower virtual desktop and application delivery costs.

These tools should be able to discover and assess compatibility issues in legacy application environments, as well as prepare to seamlessly and efficiently support multiple desktop and server environments. This should help you lower deployment and management costs and, ideally, take advantage of Hyper-V as the lowest cost, highest density hypervisor. Also, understand the economic benefits of deploying through a blended approach. Not every environment necessarily lends itself to a wholesale virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) solution or a terminal server/session virtualization-only approach. A blend of solutions delivers application virtualization, facilitates user customization and meets varied workload demands.

#6. Take steps to mitigate risks early in the process.

Through automated compatibility testing, potential snags are identified early, helping to provide solutions faster and with less hassle down the road. Additionally, a centralized data control model eases management headaches and improves application testing quality.

#8. Don't skimp on the hardware.

Not surprisingly, IT decision-makers have to take a software-centric view of a Windows 8 deployment. But part of making that deployment – and its subsequent management – go smoothly is ensuring that there's enough infrastructure horsepower to support the increased functionality and heightened user expectations for the new operating system. You certainly want to run Windows 8 on 64-bit clients wherever possible, with suitable RAM, disk and graphics accelerators to handle its more sophisticated functionality. Also, worker productivity and user satisfaction are heavily influenced by network bandwidth, particularly when more and more applications are accessed via a cloud computing architecture.

#9. Consider combining virtualization and Windows 8 as concurrent projects.

There are several reasons why this makes sense. First, it's simply a better use of your tight budgets and stretched-out staff resources (both internal and outsourced). Second, it's a smarter way to surface the full array of issues, challenges and potential problems before they hit production systems. Finally, doing so allows you to assess for multiple technology compatibility bottlenecks simultaneously, both speeding deployment and eliminating post-deployment complaints.

#10. Understand the growing role tablets will play in enterprise solutions.

Regardless of the specific brand or form factor, tablet computing represents a new paradigm in user productivity throughout the enterprise, and your Windows 8 deployment must take it into account from the start, rather than as an afterthought. Be sure to analyze and assess the viability of porting legacy applications to current and future tablets, with strong emphasis on compatibility testing for that form factor. Since more and more employees (as well as contractors, partners, suppliers and other audiences) are accessing applications, data and services from nontraditional locations, it's essential to get this right.

Summary

Windows 8 is a big step forward for many business users and IT organizations alike, especially for those that haven't yet migrated from Windows XP and Vista environments. But, similar to the transition to Windows 7 that started three years ago, if you devote sufficient time and resources to analyzing, assessing and testing applications, you can ensure full compatibility of those applications with Windows 8. In particular, IT administrators must take into account how they will transition to Windows 8 on the host of devices that are embedded in the new workplace reality.

Fortunately, IT leaders have access to a number of innovative, highly automated tools to help speed deployment, control migration costs and ensure greater user satisfaction and productivity. Through a combination of technology and services, reliable Windows tools providers can help accelerate Windows 8 deployments and mitigate risks, while ensuring application readiness and availability across all devices at any location.