Debunking the Top 10 Cloud-Hosted Virtual Desktop Myths

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Summary

Desktops as a Service (DaaS) is the delivery of a virtual desktop offered as a hosted service offered by a service provider. DaaS has the potential to radically change the way desktops are purchased and managed. However, as is typical with such emerging, disruptive technologies, there is a good deal of confusion about what is and isn't possible with DaaS.

This paper exposes—and debunks—the top 10 DaaS myths, which range from supposed cost, user experience and security issues, to ease of use, licensing and integration limitations. It shows how, by consuming virtual desktops as a cloud-hosted service, businesses can deliver high-performing desktops to users on any device in minutes, easing IT management burdens and reducing the total cost of desktop ownership.

MYTH 1

#1 You Can't Do DaaS Under Microsoft Licensing

There has been a lot of noise recently about the difficulty or impossibility of offering DaaS to the market in a technically viable and cost-effective way given the challenges imposed by Microsoft licensing. Not only is it possible to offer DaaS successfully, but service providers are also moving on this opportunity and organizations are consuming it.

- For a full dedicated Windows 7 client desktop: The service provider runs dedicated servers for each customer and the end customer uses Microsoft VDA (virtual desktop access) licensing for the Windows desktops. If you already own Software Assurance on the end user device, it includes VDA and allows you to access the virtual desktop. A multi-tenant DaaS platform can still be leveraged for the management layer, reducing the costs of management, shared storage and networking.

- For a shared or dedicated Windows Server OS: Windows Servers can be licensed using SPLA (service provider license agreement). In this case, a service provider can rent a Windows Server to a customer on a monthly basis. A DaaS multi-tenant platform can provide the ability to partition a server and share it with multiple customers. This is done securely by providing separate datastores and VLANs per customer, allowing the service provider to achieve 100% fulfillment of compute resources.

MYTH 2

Only Shared Session-Based Desktops Can Be Used for DaaS

Many believe that you can only use a shared desktop technology like terminal services to deliver DaaS. This is true when looking at traditional VDI technology. However, VDI technology with true multi-tenancy, is capable of delivering full featured VDI desktops. A dedicated virtual desktop delivers a user experience that surpasses that of terminal services. This makes the DaaS user experience consistently strong regardless of how many people concurrently access their desktops. A dedicated desktop allows users to work with their desktop in the same manner they work with their traditional physical PC. They can customize it and install applications.

Even if shared desktop technologies could be rigged for DaaS, they would not be appropriate for most users for the simple reason that they do not allow local installations. Commonly used online services, such as WebEx, Skype and Dropbox, would be off limits, rendering the solution ineffective.

MYTH 3

DaaS is Expensive Like Traditional VDI

It's true that Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) can be very expensive. In fact, that's one of it's main drawbacks, especially the upfront cash/CAPEX investment. DaaS, however, is very different. Whereas traditional VDI requires purchasing and supporting new infrastructure, such as servers, networking and storage, DaaS has no upfront capital expenditures and lower ongoing OpEx. That's because rather than providing your own infrastructure, you're utilizing the service provider's environment. And, since you only pay for the resources you need, not only are the costs associated with DaaS predictable, you benefit from the buying power of large service providers.

On an ongoing basis, DaaS costs just a fraction of VDI to maintain. Provisioning efforts and related expenses are dramatically lower because there are no physical machines to rollout; you simply click on the DaaS portal to order and configure virtual desktops. Decommissioning is just as quick.

DaaS also minimizes time-consuming, expensive help-desk support. Repairing a desktop is as easy as refreshing it with a new virtual machine (VM). There is no downtime, no lost productivity because of users waiting for desktop to be fixed, and no lost revenue.

MYTH 4

DaaS Delivers Poor User Experience

The DaaS user experience is as good, if not better than, a rich client experience, and significantly better than a shared terminal services based desktop and VDI deployed onsite.

One of the main user challenges of VDI is servicing a user who is physically far away from the VDI datacenter. With DaaS, you can optimize performance by partnering with a proven cloud-hosted desktop provider. That way you can take advantage of global data centers where proximity to users and world-class infrastructure results in sub-20 millisecond latency. These providers also allow you to choose best-fit protocols for task workers, graphics and video needs, and mix and match depending on the use case.

MYTH 5

DaaS Security is Lacking

Some businesses are concerned that DaaS will put their data at risk. This is an unjustified fear. DaaS can be more secure than traditional PCs, where data resides locally and can easily be lost or stolen.

With DaaS, each employee's data resides in the corporate data center (see Myth #6) — not on the user's device and not offsite at the cloud hosting provider. Even if a user's device is lost, the data is protected. A high level of security is ensured by maintaining your corporate security features and policies (i.e. with firewalls and Active-Directory controls). No longer do you have to worry about viruses from local desktops infecting the corporate network.

MYTH 6

DaaS Won't Work with Your Onsite IT Assets

Many believe that because their desktop is now in the cloud, they can't access IT assets located onsite. DaaS is designed to securely work with virtually any IT asset. This includes resources that are onsite at your organization or offsite at your provider, such as shared storage, Active Directory and enterprise applications. DaaS providers can also integrate with other cloud services for an enhanced overall offering. Users will be able to use their cloud-hosted desktops exactly how they used their old physical PC.

MYTH 7

DaaS Does Not Support Consumerization of IT

Not only is consumerization of IT supported, but DaaS also makes it much easier to implement and manage. DaaS is ideal for "bring your own device" (BYOD) approaches, since employees can get their Windows desktops on whatever hardware they choose, including iPads, Androids and Macs.

With DaaS virtual desktops, users can easily segregate work from personal life without having to carry two devices. IT wins with DaaS too. Inside the virtual desktop, you can ensure secure, policy-controlled access to the corporate network. Everything outside the corporate virtual desktop can be at the discretion of the users, who support their own personal device and software.

MYTH 8

Migrating Users to DaaS is Hard

It's actually a lot easier than you think, especially when you compare migrating DaaS users to replacing a PC or laptop. Users can customize their desktops to look and feel exactly as they'd like. They can also install their own applications and data. And, because DaaS can connect to peripherals such as local and network printers and monitors, employees can use their desktops just as they have in the past. It's simple, fast and requires little to no user training. A DaaS multi-tenant platform can provide the ability to partition a server and share it with multiple customers. This is done securely by providing separate datastores and VLANs per customer, allowing the service provider to achieve 100% fulfillment of complete resources.

MYTH 9

DaaS Requires Lots of Bandwidth

This is a misconception because people erroneously believe they will be downloading a 'desktop' every time they use DaaS. Average DSL is more than sufficient to accommodate DaaS.

When you connect to your DaaS desktop, the entire screen is initially painted. However, as you continue working, only the pixels that change are transmitted back to the endpoint. As a result, most of the bandwidth is downstream since changes to the screen are pushed from the virtual desktop to the endpoint. This matches up well with how bandwidth is provisioned, as download bandwidth is usually on orders of magnitude greater than upload bandwidth. The average bandwidth utilization is around 100 kilobytes per session.

MYTH 10

The Disconnected Use Case is a Deal-Breaker

Cloud-hosted desktops, as well as traditional VDI, require the user's device to be connected. However, this is not a big issue for businesses. In fact, Wi-Fi and 3G/4G has become so prevalent, we haven't heard of any instances where this prevented an organization from adopting and reaping substantial benefits from cloud-hosted desktops.

The reality is that most users don't need continual or even frequent disconnected access. Many people who need to be connected generally want it at ad hoc times for email, and they can do that pretty easily with wireless and Wi-Fi, and devices like smartphones and iPads. The few users who do need continual connections can be provisioned with rich laptops.

Conclusion

DaaS is rapidly gaining momentum in businesses of all sizes because it delivers tremendous benefits compared to traditional VDI, terminal services and rich desktops. Although not intended to be the solution for every user in your organization, the fact that DaaS is so flexible, secure, manageable, inexpensive and high-performing, makes it ideal for the majority of workers.

About Quest

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About Desktone

Desktone is changing the way people buy and manage desktops. Desktone pioneered the concept of Desktops as a Service (DaaS), the easiest and most affordable way to deploy cloud-hosted virtual desktops. The Desktone Cloud, Desktone's DaaS offering, provides all of the benefits of virtualized desktops without any of the hassles. By delivering virtual desktops in the cloud, Desktone enables businesses to rapidly provision desktops to users on any device, anywhere, without the upfront costs and complexity of traditional desktop virtualization—transforming desktops from a CAPEX to OPEX item.

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