

Leading Architectural & Design Firm Builds High-Performance Workstations

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– Jeremy Stroebel, Director, IT
Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf

Organization:

Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf
Indianapolis, IN

Virtual Desktop Infrastructure Environment:

Approximately 40 workstations virtualized with Citrix XenDesk

Products:

ProfileUnity™ with FlexApp™
Stratusphere UX™

Overview

A leading architecture, interior design and landscape architecture firm frequently upgrades and customizes its software applications and workstations to give its architects and designers the latest, most powerful tools. To make it easier to create, optimize and maintain a high-performance computing environment, the firm migrated its professional staff to non-persistent virtual desktops and introduced ProfileUnity and its ProfileDisk feature to manage large, customized user profiles.

The Challenge

Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf, an award-winning architecture, interior design and landscape architecture and planning firm in Indianapolis, has done projects for some of the most iconic facilities and organizations in the region, including the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Lucas Oil Stadium, the Boy Scouts of America, Ball State University, Butler University, the Indianapolis Museum of Art and many others. To help its architectural and design staff innovate and work to its fullest, Browning Day frequently upgrades its design software and workstations and allows the staff to have custom configurations to suit their work preferences. Although the firm has designed some of the largest facilities in the region, it is not a large company. It can be challenging for the IT staff to support the frequently changing, high-performance desktop environment.

To help meet the challenge, Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf transitioned its architectural and design staff to virtual desktops. "Having a virtual desktop environment allows us to be nimble to change quickly as requirements and software change," says Jeremy Stroebel, director of IT at Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf. "We always need the best possible performance we can get from our software."

When the company was investigating and piloting virtual desktops before committing to using them, Stroebel learned some valuable lessons. Notably, it became clear that while the virtual infrastructure is crucial, the user experience is just as important.

“User acceptance is the biggest issue you have to deal with when you virtualize desktops,” he said. “The tech stuff can all be solved; the success or failure of your project comes down to whether the users are happy. We knew we had to get our virtual desktop environment right the first time.”

The Solution

After investigation and testing many tools and techniques, Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf chose an infrastructure featuring non-persistent virtual desktops, the Citrix XenDesktop environment for the hypervisor and brokering, and the Essentials bundle from Liquidware for advanced user experience and desktop environment management.

“We included Liquidware’s products in the infrastructure from the beginning because they gave us more visibility and control over the environment than we could get with the built-in Citrix tools,” says Stroebel. “Stratusphere UX [one of the components of the Essentials bundle] was really useful for sizing the virtual desktop each user would need before we converted them from physical to virtual desktops.”

Stratusphere UX is the industry-leading solution for user-experience monitoring and diagnostics. It works on both physical and virtual desktops and collects performance and resource consumption data. The data and management features used for day-to-day management and optimization are also very valuable when planning physical-to-virtual migrations. Administrators can see actual resource consumption as well as sources of resource conflicts to help them

manage virtual desktops and infrastructure effectively. “We use Stratusphere UX every time we onboard somebody to VDI,” says Stroebel.

Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf makes even more use of Liquidware’s ProfileUnity, the user environment management solution that is the key to enabling the architects and designers to keep all their customizations and personalized configurations on their virtual desktops.

“Non-persistent desktops can have a lot of little issues and one-off situations,” says Stroebel. “ProfileUnity has filters that automatically manage redirections along with other features that make it easy to manage inconsistent user images.”

Stroebel considers ProfileUnity’s ProfileDisk to be the key feature that enables its high-performance, highly customized virtual-desktop environment, and as a big differentiator in the market.

ProfileDisk allows organizations to have users’ entire profiles on a provisioned VHD or VMDK. Many organizations use ProfileDisk in production to provide Office 365 caching to handle extremely large profiles and to enable Microsoft Windows and Outlook Indexing and Search on virtual desktops. Having the ability to handle large profiles is very important for Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf. “Users can even make their own changes, which is great for us,” says Stroebel.

ProfileDisk seamlessly off-loads the entire user profile to disk for optimum performance and flexibility. It can be used with ProfileUnity’s long-standing portability rule sets, giving administrators the best of both worlds – lightning fast profiles that are fully customizable, even when they are extremely large.

“ProfileUnity with ProfileDisk is what allows us to run non-persistent virtual desktops. Our users don’t even know they’re using a virtual desktop that refreshes every night,” notes Stroebel.

The Results

Among the immediate changes and benefits Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf gained from the new environment is that everything can now be managed centrally. “Before, we just couldn’t do that because we have so much disparate stuff – PCs, laptops, different operating system versions and applications. It was hard to manage,” says Stroebel.

“Now, we can completely retool a desktop with completely new software just by building a new profile. We did that recently and it took less than a day. Before, it would have been a multi-day project that could start only after I found someone who was available to do the job. Even then, we still wouldn’t have had the flexibility to change our desktop hardware to accommodate new software.”

The combination of virtualization and the control enabled by the Essentials bundle provided Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf with the high performance and personalization features it needed to make its migration successful.

“ProfileUnity is the Swiss Army knife for our VDI. For most people I talk to, when they have a problem in their virtual desktops, it’s like ‘I don’t know how to fix this.’ ProfileUnity makes it so easy to see what needs to be done and gives you the tools to do it. It’s easy to deal with a lot of one-off issues, which is big for us,” says Stroebel.

“If one person wants something configured differently to accommodate the way they work, we need to be able to do it, because that’s the difference whether that person will be miserable – or happy, which is what we want.”



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