Children's Therapy Organization Solves Microsoft Outlook Issues with Liquidware

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*– Greg McDonald,
Director of Applications, CTC*

Organization:

Children's Therapy Center (CTC)

Virtual Desktop Users:

125

Products:

ProfileUnity™

Overview

Nearly all employees at Children's Therapy Center (CTC) work from a virtual desktop. The pediatric health services provider had been using virtual desktops for many years, but users began experiencing performance problems after it switched to Office 365. Outlook was a real problem due to limited options for cached mailboxes on non-persistent desktops. User mailboxes were slow and often unusable. Troubleshooting by Liquidware technical support engineers helped diagnose and solve the problem and, today, ProfileUnity keeps user desktops intact and running smoothly.

The Challenge

Children's Therapy Center is a specialty medical practice that provides physical, occupational and speech therapy services to children with special needs, either in their homes or at its offices in the Seattle/Tacoma area. CTC was an early adopter of virtual desktops, "Virtual desktops were a great improvement for us because it allowed our therapists to access patient information securely from any place at any time," said Greg McDonald, CTC's director of applications. "But over time we got to a point where we outgrew what Roaming Profiles could do for us."

Specifically, Roaming Profiles was not a good fit for CTC's virtual desktop architecture after the organization converted from an on-premise Exchange Server to Microsoft Office 365. After the switch, CTC employees had problems with their Outlook email accounts, because mailboxes performed slowly while online with Office 365, or they were unresponsive while a copy of the mailbox was downloading – which took 20 or 30 minutes – only to be thrown away with the non-persistent desktop after logoff.

Clearly this lag was unacceptable, and it was disruptive to therapists' productivity and the services they could provide to their patients. "Not only did it take a long time to load, but Outlook was running slowly," said McDonald. "It affected everyone's work performance."

CTC has two base images and maintains a floating pool of 125 virtual desktops (the current environment consists of VMware View 6.02 and vSphere 5.5). Virtual desktops are accessed from a variety of devices; therapists use zero-clients and Chromebooks, while other CTC employees use either desktop PCs or laptops. However, all users connecting to non-persistent desktops were experiencing the same frustration from slow Outlook performance.

The Solution

McDonald turned to Liquidware for help. CTC had purchased Liquidware's ProfileUnity user-experience management solution several years previously, but it was never activated because CTC's virtual desktop infrastructure had been running smoothly. ProfileUnity is well-known for its ability to speed up logins and manage user profiles with greater control. McDonald thought it might allow CTC to cache the Outlook mailbox to a network location rather than to a local C drive.

"Outlook performs best when you can cache the mailbox to the local desktop or a network location," said McDonald. "We were using Roaming Profiles for profile management, but it doesn't give us the ability to redirect where the cached mailbox is stored. If we enable Outlook caching with Roaming Profiles, the entire mailbox is downloaded—and thrown away in the non-persistent desktop—every day. That made Outlook startup excessively slow and maxed out our network bandwidth."

- Office 365 requires caching with the user's profile, and Outlook indexing is usually turned off in virtual environments. However, ProfileUnity's "Portability" feature module can be set to load select profile data automatically in the background after login, instead of during login, thus avoiding common Microsoft Profile data bottlenecks that occur early in Windows sessions. CTC IT staff can also leverage ProfileUnity's exclusive ProfileDisk technology, which is designed to easily handle large profiles, such as those containing Microsoft Office 365 Offline Cached mode data. ProfileDisk is a ProfileUnity provisioned

VHD or VMDK that seamlessly offloads the entire user profile for optimum performance and flexibility. ProfileDisk technology can be used with ProfileUnity's longstanding Portability rule sets, giving administrators the best of both worlds—a lightning fast profile that is fully customizable.

ProfileDisk supports virtual desktop environments such as Citrix XenDesktop and VMware Horizon View plus physical desktops, while providing the following benefits:

- Windows and Microsoft Outlook/Office 365 Indexing and Search – Windows Indexing is usually off in VDI environments because it negatively impacts user performance. ProfileDisk enables indexing and search to remain on with its high-performance capabilities that do not impact the user session.

- Office 365 Cached Mode – Office 365 requires caching within the user's profile. ProfileDisk seamlessly enables Office 365 functionality in virtual desktop environments.

Large Profiles – Often user profiles may need to remain large because of applications that may write to profile files, such as Office 365, Skype for Business and Lotus Notes. ProfileDisk handles these applications with ease.

- Speedy Logon Times in Non-Persistent/ Stateless VDI environments – Non-persistent VDI environments do not retain user profiles on their own, mandating that large portions of a user profile must be written at logon or throughout the user session. This can cause poor login performance or slow application response times. ProfileDisk eliminates large profiles transfers to end user desktops, allowing for speedy logon times and great session performance.

- ProfileDisk provides native Windows profile performance without requiring a file system filter driver.

After the CTC staff made the changes, Outlook load more quickly for users. However, it continued to periodically disappear from user profiles.

"We kept working with CTC to see what other issues could be affecting Outlook," said Glen Porter, director of technical support at Liquidware. "We found that after CTC upgraded to Office 365, some files weren't in the right places. There were also multiple profiles for the same individuals, especially the Chromebook users. So, when users would log in, the system wouldn't always see the right profile and would load a different one, which caused bloat."

"One day, two of our therapists called me and said, 'Hey, my email account is missing,' and I had just configured their Chromebooks to use the Chromebook VMware View App," said McDonald. "That's when it hit me: it was the Chromebook users who kept losing Outlook."

McDonald shared that insight with Porter. Together, they determined that the Chromebook VMware View App was the root cause, and Outlook has been available to Chromebook users without any issues ever since.

The Results

"Even though that wasn't a Liquidware problem, their engineers were very helpful," said McDonald. "In fact, the whole experience with Liquidware support was great. They really worked to understand what was happening."

CTC now has ProfileUnity installed, using it on an ongoing basis to manage user profiles and help keep virtual desktops running smoothly. ProfileUnity's ability to provide search indexing for Outlook has been very useful. "A lot of the functionality we needed, or problems that we had, were things that Liquidware had already thought of and solved in ProfileUnity," said McDonald.

He plans to start using ProfileUnity's FlexApp application layering technology. FlexApp layers applications to streamline delivery. It manages application rights, allows user self-service for installing apps, and reduces desktop storage, network and computing costs.

"When we do our next Office upgrade we want to keep our base images as clean as possible. FlexApp looks like it is going to be very, very helpful for that," said McDonald. He can consider upgrades now that the Outlook problems are solved and virtual desktops have become fast and reliable.

"Now our virtual desktops are where we wanted them to be," said McDonald. "Our systems are running so much better than they ever did before."

HQ 3600 Mansell Road Suite 200 | Alpharetta, GA 30022

866.914.9667 **|** Liquidware.com **|** info@Liquidware.com