Liquidware Reduces Complexity, Increases Productivity and Simplifies OS Upgrades within Legal Firm's VDI Estate

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*– Alexander L. Diaz Director of Infrastructure, and Datacenter Operations
Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP*

Organization:

Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP

Virtual Desktop Users:

1,200

Products:

Stratusphere UX™
ProfileUnity™
FlexApp™

Overview

Founded in 1974 with 24 attorneys all based in Chicago, Katten now has nearly 700 attorneys located across London, Shanghai and 11 US cities. The firm's philosophy remains focused on the principles that guided the firm's founding: a desire to be nimble, strategic, creative and client-centric. Alexander (Alex) L. Diaz is Katten's Director of Infrastructure and Datacenter Operations.

Katten has a VMware Horizon VDI infrastructure primarily used for remote access for staff, contractors, an after-hours help desk, outsourced word processing operations and contracted attorneys. Prior to deploying Liquidware solutions, Katten provided individual VDI-hosted machines to each attorney and other professionals.

The Challenge

VMware provided some information on performance and connectivity issues, but Alex still lacked a good management solution for troubleshooting. Originally, approximately 1,200 machines were configured to be persistent, requiring considerable management overhead. Consequently, they were switched to linked clones. "This, however, meant we had to bump up our Horizon licensing, as we were running about 1,200 machines," explained Alex. "User login times – that began to exceed one minute – were also badly affecting the user experience. So, we required a solution to mitigate that, too."

Katten is vigilant about staying up to date with the latest Windows desktop OS releases, due in large part to ensuring security for the nature and sensitivity of their users' work. The firm requires minimum user downtime at point of OS upgrade.

The Solution

"We needed a solution set that would provide monitoring and diagnostics – one that would enhance our group policy and one that would deliver applications – ideally from one vendor," stated Alex.

"Stratusphere UX's metrics go very in-depth and, as such, the solution has become more of a third-level diagnostics-support solution. When engineers get troubleshooting calls, they leverage Stratusphere UX to see what's going on with the VDI machines.

"We've recently discussed leveraging the Stratusphere UX monitoring agent on 10 to 15 desktops and another 10 to 15 laptops in each of our offices to create a performance baseline for Windows 10 deployments. We want to get an idea of average workloads in each of the offices. We also get stats on memory usage, in memory apps and we're able to get some usage per application. Primarily, we're looking for any degradation in performance so we can head off anything before it manifests into a bigger challenge. Every year or so we're forced to upgrade Windows 10. Stratusphere UX has become an important tool for knowing that the equipment we provide is continuing to perform well with the OS and apps loaded on it, while continuing to provide a good user experience.

We're utilizing FlexApp application layering, ProfileUnity and ProfileDisk with VHDs on Flash storage. This gives really great performance, particularly with iManage, our document management system."

Katten has retired all Windows 7 machines, having started a Windows 10 project nearly three years before. A year ago, they moved to Windows 10 1803; currently they're working on a 1909 image.

"One of the things I love about Liquidware is that it's always early in the support chain for OS releases. Because Liquidware product releases support the latest Windows 10 version, we don't have to wait months for their solutions to catch up. With some other vendors we're still waiting for support for the latest version of Win 10.

"For our Windows 10-to-Windows 10 migrations, where significant user profile changes can occur, ProfileUnity has been very helpful in enabling zero-downtime-migrations. We're not recreating profiles for users going from one version of Windows 10 to the latest one."

The Results

Katten now has about only 300 machines running at any given time. "It's much better than 1,200 persistent machines!" exclaimed Alex. Desktop, profiles, Google Drive, etc., are all brought back in from redirects to ProfileDisk. "Our users log off; the virtual machine gets destroyed. Next time they log in, they get a fresh machine with all their settings, thanks to ProfileUnity. It was a big win for us, because it's putting a much lesser strain on our VDI environment, as we don't have 1,000 machines spun up all the time," explained Alex.

"Microsoft Group Policy Preferences take a lot longer to process on VDI; they now process a lot faster with ProfileUnity. By moving those to ProfileUnity, we shaved off 40 seconds for logins. User and Local Machine Windows registry keys are also set with ProfileUnity. We need to set a bunch of keys for SpeechExec and Research Monitor as well, many of which are machine policies that could not be set with GPPs – but ProfileUnity does it. Law-firm environments

always require exceptions; for example, many Google Chrome keys, Outlook keys and others are set for the majority, but some users' specific requirements differ. ProfileUnity, again, assists greatly here."

VDI login times are now down to about 28 seconds. Katten uses a combination of practices to achieve that, such as optimizing Office settings with a loopback policy and setting a bunch of keys/preferences within ProfileUnity. "We're also leveraging ProfileUnity's context-aware features to distribute FlexApps along with shortcuts to SaaS apps, such as Concordance, a litigation software. We also provide shortcuts that launch a specific browser and URL, such as our internal portal, corporate travel site and our Interaction CRM. ProfileUnity's context-awareness really enhances the user experience."

Alex concludes, "We've recommended Liquidware to several other law firms in town. I've been an advocate of the products since we first licensed them."

Katten's mission statement is: Answers for the short run; vision for the long haul. The utilization of Liquidware within Katten's VDI environment certainly reflects that statement from a desktop-operations perspective.

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