FlexVirtual Supports Hanze UAS through a Successful Windows XP to Windows 7 Migration Project

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- Henk Weisbeek
Hanze UAS Desktop Transformation
Project Manager

Organization:

Hanze University
of Applied Sciences,
Groningen, Netherlands

Virtual Desktop Users:

30,000+

Products:

ProfileUnity™

Overview

Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen, (Hanze UAS) based in the Netherlands, provides high quality academic programmes that integrate applied research and innovation, in state-of-the-art modern facilities at its beautiful, expansive Groningen campus. The arts, technology, energy, business, sports and health care. For applied research on these themes, more than 50 professors in 6 Centres of Research and Innovation are responsible. In the course of its history, Hanze UAS (www.hanze.nl/home/International) has built a reputation of being truly international. Its degree programmes, taught in Dutch and English, prepare students from all over the world for professional careers in an increasingly international environment. The Hanze their talents. Hanze UAS actively participates in projects aimed at supporting higher education institutions abroad with the enhancement of their curricula and strengthening of their institutional capacity.

The Challenge

In late 2012, Hanze UAS executive management made a strategic decision to modernize the organization's desktop environment. They called upon their established IT partner, FlexVirtual, to assist with planning a desktop transformation project. Hanze UAS IT staff had previously worked with FlexVirtual, a Liquidware Partner, for storage virtualization and server virtualization projects, and knew they had a "trusted advisor" with the right background, expertise and vendor knowledge to advance them through this initiative. "Hanze UAS IT Staff wants to collaborate with their partners rather than just receive services," said Alex Pelster, Director at FlexVirtual. "They are interested in deepening their technical knowledge, which has been a consistent attribute of our successful relationship. Our philosophy at FlexVirtual is to enable our customers. We want to add to their knowledge and experience, in addition to helping them deploy a solution. In our opinion, this is a much better approach to a long-term relationship and has helped us achieve a 'trusted' status with Hanze IT Staff."

With guidance from FlexVirtual, Hanze UAS went to U.S. universities and colleges to see VDI deployments in action and to explore the right architecture for their needs. Although the University had as many as 30,000 Active Directory users across all their offerings, FlexVirtual proposed they begin their project by focusing on the approximately 4,500 managed desktops that encompassed university administration, faculty and regular, full-time students.

Hanze UAS IT Staff knew that it would be a significant transition to VDI and so made the decision to proceed methodically in order to institute best practices from the start. In addition, they wanted to achieve the right balance between VDI and SAAS initiatives based on an analysis of how frequently and in what manner, their universe of 30,000 users utilized learning resources. But regardless of how they would proceed, Hanze UAS IT staff knew that applications being used by employees and students required a move to Windows 7, especially in light of Windows XP End-of-Support in April 2014. So even before Hanze UAS IT staff settled on a final VDI architecture, they planned a Windows XP to Windows 7 migration, keeping users on physical PCs and only gradually moving them to a virtual platform over time.

"We saw early on that no matter how we virtualized our desktops, our most immediate objective was to move users off of Windows XP and on to Windows 7 as quickly as possible," said Henk Weisbeek, who was project manager for Hanze University's desktop transformation project.

According to Weisbeek, however, planning the migration was one thing. Accomplishing it in a timely, structured fashion was another. Before too long, Hanze IT Staff quickly realized that this would be no small task to move thousands of users to Windows 7 without a specialized solution to automate the process. The main impediment to a smooth move was that Windows XP utilized a "version 1" profile and Windows 7 utilized a "version 2" profile.

With the launch of Windows Vista and Windows 7, Microsoft changed the user profile format with new folder names and storage locations. This change disrupted the ability of Windows XP/2000/and Server 2003 roaming profiles, and solutions that rely on roaming profiles, to migrate or co-exist with Windows 7 and later operating systems.

"We had several key objectives in the migration project," said Stefan Herder, desktop administrator and lead engineer at Hanze. "First and foremost was that the solution we needed must work for us from an operations management perspective. It needed to fit in with the infrastructure we had in place for managing our desktops."

The Solution

As in the past, Hanze UAS turned to Liquidware Partner FlexVirtual for recommendations, who suggested ProfileUnity for the migrations project.

FlexVirtual embarked on scoping out the Requirements and Design for the migration and to address a critical login delay issue. "Students typically login and out of their workspaces up from 6 to 8 times a day, and it was taking more than 2 minutes each time," said Alex Pelster, Director for FlexVirtual. "This becomes a significant bottleneck when you calculate this against a 50-minute class period, and can affect as many as 30,000 students and employees across the schools. Hanze UAS wanted to significantly cut down on login times for everybody.

"Once we saw ProfileUnity in action, we knew it was a very good fit for us," said Weisbeek.

Liquidware ProfileUnity automatically virtualizes user profiles and settings and synchs mission critical user authored data to network or cloud storage. From the first time that ProfileUnity runs, the solution creates universal user Windows profiles in native format that supports users' ability to transition to any modern Windows operating

system including XP/2000/ Server 2003/Vista/ Windows 7/Server 2008, and now, Windows 8. With ProfileUnity, users are ready for an Anytime Migration™ to Windows 7. User productivity is unaffected and there is no user downtime in the migrations process. Acceptance of the new OS platform is seamless when the user logs-in for the first time. The University adopted a phased approach in moving desktop users from Windows XP to Windows 7 based on where the users were located (building to building) on the University campus. Accurate reporting within ProfileUnity was a critical aspect for Hanze IT Staff as it kept them on track, knowing which users were migrated successfully.

"The fact that the project took several months was largely based on the fact that Hanze IT Staff wanted to perform the migrations at their own pace, and do the work themselves," said Pelster. "This approach also allowed them to fully explore the potential of ProfileUnity for profile management for the desktop environment even after the migrations project was completed."

The Results

Hanze UAS is also ready for a seamless move to Windows 8 when the time comes as ProfileUnity is on track to support this OS in 2014. In fact, utilizing ProfileUnity for post-migrations profile management offers a number of clear advantages to Hanze UAS in line with its strategic goals, according to Weisbeek.

"ProfileUnity has already moved us from the limitations of roaming profiles and helped us make the transition to Windows 7, which are critical steps for us to improve our workspace delivery mode and keep Hanze UAS at the forefront of education trends internationally," said Weisbeek. The University's central mission is to develop students professionally to the highest standards equipping them for careers immediately upon graduation. The caliber and

quality of the IT workspace students learn on is central to ensuring that they can meet the challenges of their professions.

"Our students are very literate with technology, using the latest devices, apps and social media. They are very demanding, requiring the best and more from us, and we need to implement a new workspace model that is flexible and easy to provision but secure and manageable as well. We want to enable anytime, anywhere, any device BYOD services for our students," said Weisbeek, who added, "However, this means we need to know which persona is using which functionality at any given time of day/month/period. We need to have a solid strategy on delivering persona, applications and data based upon users' location and devices to deliver our vision of a flexible workspace. ProfileUnity puts on a solid path to accomplishing this central objective of delivering IT to further empower our students and equip them for the future."