Liquidware Labs™

Customer Profile

Homes and Community Organisation Builds for the Future with ProfileUnity™

> *"ProfileUnity was so much easier to deploy than the others ... It was easy to use and gives us exactly what we need."*
> *- Dan Evans*
> *ICT Infrastructure Manager*
> *livin*

Organization: livin

Virtual Desktop Users:
95 and growing

Product: ProfileUnity

Overview
livin is a homes and community organisation that provides affordable housing and manages in excess of 8,500 residential and commercial properties in County Durham in the northeast of England. livin have recently moved to a new, purpose built office building, and wanted a modern PC environment to match. The information and communication technology (ICT) team saw tremendous benefits in migrating to a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), but was also aware that virtual desktops would bring new management challenges.

The Challenge
livin institutes a PC-refresh cycle of its desktop computers every four years. The refresh cycle coincided with the ICT teams plans to implement and put up-to-date desktops in place when it moved into its own new purpose-built facility. The organisation's objectives included migrating from Windows® XP to Windows 7, and making more use of virtualised desktops.   The ICT staff initially experimented with desktop virtualisation using Citrix® remote presentation sessions, however, this technology did not provide the level of performance and personalisation livin wanted.

Having successfully virtualised its servers in the VMware® environment – all but one server has been virtualised – livin decided to investigate the VMware View virtual desktop environment. Background research and pilot testing revealed many attainable and powerful benefits to implementing VMware virtual desktops – and several significant challenges.

Dan Evans, ICT Infrastructure Manager for livin, said: "We knew that the biggest reason virtual desktop initiatives fail is because of the user experience."

Mr. Evans added: "The biggest issue we had was profile management. We have a very diverse software environment, so we cannot use only a few standard images. With remote presentation sessions we used previously, we had problems with profile synchronisation, and with the overall stability of the virtual desktops. We knew we could not go forward with VDI until we had a solid way to manage profiles across our environment."

The Solution

The ICT team identified several potential profile management solutions. The most important requirements were:

• Ability to seamlessly work with the VMware view environment;
• Simple installation, configuration and use;
• Provide a consistent experience for livins' users, whose desktops and application stacks are highly individualised;
• Preserve user desktop settings and do not revert to default at each login.

Mr. Evans added: "We did not want something that would put a lot of controls on what users could do. Our users have few restrictions. We wanted something that would simply ensure their profile portability. If we could do that, we would have a lot of options for having people work from home or other mobile environments."

With these requirements established, livin identified and evaluated several profile management options.

"A lot of them were complete overkill and ridiculously expensive for what we need. Most of them needed a dedicated server and would make us install agents on each desktop. That just adds expense and management overhead," said Mr. Evans.

The solutions that were not ruled out because of cost and complexity were then installed for trials. At this stage of the evaluation process, ProfileUnity from Liquidware Labs stood out from the competition.

Commenting on ProfileUnity, Mr. Evans said: "First off, ProfileUnity was so much easier to deploy than the others. We really like that it fits right in to the VMware environment. Once it is installed, it is a very simple and elegant solution. It was easy to use and gives us exactly what we need."

ProfileUnity works with VMware View and any other platform that supports Windows OS, including Citrix XenDesktop. ProfileUnity delivers a complete profile (with desktop customisations, applications and data) to users at logon in seconds, and gives administrators summary and complete views of virtual desktop settings as well as provides many reporting options.

"We can see all the user settings, which are not stored in a propriety format. That's quite handy because it allows us to diagnose problems very quickly," said Mr. Evans.

ProfileUnity works in virtual, physical and terminal services environments and can be used to safely migrate Windows users to new versions of the OS, a feature livin plans to make use of as it continues its upgrade from Windows XP to Windows 7.

The Results

livin has deployed 95 virtual desktops and plans to bring all 175 of its users into the virtual desktop infrastructure as it continues its update program. The organisation frequently updates and optimizes its PCs, and has found the process is much easier for virtual desktop users now that ProfileUnity is in place.

According to Mr. Evans: "Before ProfileUnity, whenever we would do an update, the desktop would revert to default settings. Now personalisation is persistent from session to session. Having user settings survive desktop refreshes makes it easy for us to refresh the desktops more often. We're constantly pushing changes to make the desktops better. Without ProfileUnity, we would not be able to take as much advantage of our virtual desktop environment.

"Problem resolution is also faster. If there is an issue, we can just roll back to a desktop image that we know works, it only takes a few clicks, so ProfileUnity has really freed up a lot of support time."

The control and confidence livin has gained by using ProfileUnity will also help the organisation expand its virtual desktop environment. It plans to migrate all of its physical Windows XP users to Windows 7 running on virtual desktops, and perhaps its CAD terminal users, too.

"We knew that to go forward with virtual desktops we had to get user profiles right, with ProfileUnity we've been able to do that," said Mr. Evans.