

Leading Midwest Catalog Retailer Makes a Smart Buy, Replaces AppSense UEM with Liquidware ProfileUnity

Overview

In 2015, a leading Midwest catalog apparel retailer replaced a competing UEM product with Liquidware Labs ProfileUnity. During the previous three-year stint with a competitor's UEM product, the company experienced a number of issues. Desktop help-desk calls jumped to an average of 200 calls weekly as users lost files, shortcuts or printer access or experienced other gaps. The SQL database backend also made updating profiles of overseas users a logistical nightmare, forcing users to come to the U.S. to perform updates. An MS Office 2013 migration was postponed because of slowness issues related to the competing product's user profiles.

After evaluating ProfileUnity and making the decision to move to this product, the company embarked on a project to restore user profiles to desktops and then "harvest" them with ProfileUnity. The transition was completed in about a month. After ProfileUnity UEM took over profile management, help-desk calls dropped to virtually zero per week, and the overseas profile-management problem was eliminated because ProfileUnity does not use an SQL DB backend. Upgrades are now smooth.

The company also got Application Rights Management at no additional charge; this feature would have cost them \$100,000 to acquire from the competition. And when renewals came along, the company declined, using that budget to fund its ProfileUnity implementation instead.

Three years ago, a leading catalog apparel retailer located in the Midwest needed to migrate its desktops from Win XP to Win 7 and move Citrix published apps from Server 2003 to Server 2008.

Coinciding with this migration, the company's IT group decided to go from roaming profiles, which were subject to bloat and corruption, to a sophisticated user environment management (UEM) solution. In 2012, the company chose AppSense Environment Manager with the goal of virtualizing and protecting user profiles, user customizations and user data. They planned to harvest user profile personalization during the migration process so users logging into their new Win 7/Server 2008 machines would retain all the settings and customizations from the Win XP/Server 2003 profiles.

The IT staff recognized it would need to support two different types of users: professional/administrative staff and customer service reps. Professional and administrative staff would require comprehensive user profile and environment management functionality. On the other hand, customer service (CS) reps were using Citrix published apps, so IT staffers were focused on ensuring that application settings were retained from one session to another while keeping certain user identifiers persistent (for example, keyboard settings, printer settings, etc.), so that CS reps would not have to log in repeatedly with all their identifiers.

The company supports 4,000 employees on average, and annually can add about 1,000 to 3,000 temporary workers during peak season. While the majority of employees work in the US, the IT staff also supports desktops for employees across locations worldwide, including the UK, Germany, Japan and an office in Hong Kong.

The IT staff had ambitious goals for the AppSense UEM deployment, but things actually worsened in the three years that the company used the solution.

Help desk calls for issues related to profiles jumped to an average of 200 calls per week as users lost files, shortcuts and printer access, or experienced other gaps in their profile settings, impeding their productivity. Some issues that arose were never adequately explained or resolved and, whenever IT staff made upgrades to the AppSense environment, the number of problems rose dramatically until issue root causes could be identified and fixed. Employees logging into new desktops suffered most, as their profiles often would not fully load.

Logistical Challenges

Another impediment arose when setting up desktop profiles for overseas employees. AppSense UEM loads all the profile settings and data into a SQL database; therefore, overseas employees required local SQL databases to be set up for their profiles. However, as the overall numbers of employees in a single location could not justify the cost, time, and effort needed to create local databases, the company decided to house all profile settings and data in the U.S. datacenter. This set up meant overseas employees had to actually come to the United States when there were major upgrades to the AppSense system. Their user profiles were so large that it was impractical to attempt to download them over a network. This situation was inconvenient, to say the least.

Further hindering the company's objectives to enhance its desktop environment was a planned migration to MS Office 2013 that had to be postponed because of slowness issues related to the AppSense UEM. The company was forced to stay with MS Office 2010 until the issue could be resolved. Sadly, with AppSense, it never was.

Worst of all, the AppSense support team was of little help resolving the issues. Often the company IT team was referred to the "knowledge base best practices" documentation or told that the next upgrade release of AppSense UEM would solve the problem.

By mid-2015, the IT team had enough. When a newly hired member of the team indicated that his previous company had considerable success with Liquidware ProfileUnity for User Environment Management, the IT team began evaluating the ProfileUnity solution. Much testing was done to prove out the product's ability to support the catalog retailers' desktop environment configuration, which ran full-blown physical PCs as well as thin-client devices that delivered Citrix published apps. They were determined to not make another bad decision, so a high priority was placed on proving the solution out.

The Solution: ProfileUnity

After extensive testing and validation, the company moved from AppSense UEM to ProfileUnity. The IT team was concerned about migrating user profiles stored in AppSense's proprietary formats in SQL databases, intent on avoiding a "data jail" that would prevent a migration to a new UEM solution. Fortunately, a recent version of AppSense UEM allowed profiles to be "reinstalled" back to the Windows OS, which facilitated the move to ProfileUnity.

When profiles were back in place on the desktops, ProfileUnity took over and "harvested" them back out of the desktops, depositing them into a centralized data store. It took about four weeks to complete the transition, which was accomplished in August 2015. Since then, the company has moved fully to ProfileUnity, with great results: Help desk calls have dropped from about 200 per week to about two, with the majority of current calls being requests for enhancements rather than issues.

ProfileUnity also solved the problem of overseas profiles updates, as the solution does not require backend servers or databases, and profiles can be easily and inexpensively stored locally. Employees report that their desktops perform very well, and new seasonal employees are on-boarded smoothly. The issues behind them, the company is moving ahead on its planned upgrade to MS Office 2013 in early Q1 2016.

Needless to say, when the AppSense reps came around to request renewal of a four-year maintenance contract, they were turned down. The cost of the renewal went into the move to ProfileUnity, and the company is breaking even for the next four years. After that it will actually realize a savings of approximately \$15,000 annually by eliminating AppSense UEM costs.

Another significant bonus for the retailer was that Liquidware ProfileUnity provides Application Rights Management features, including privilege elevation and application restrictions at no additional charge. These features are available only in a separate AppSense product at an additional cost of \$100,000. Security is a high priority for the company, and having these built-in ProfileUnity features to restrict access to unauthorized applications and lock down desktops is a major advantage that the team highly values.

Today, the company's desktops perform as expected, and the IT staff is very pleased with ProfileUnity's straightforward setup, maintenance and use, freeing up countless hours and enabling them to focus on optimizing their desktop environment. They are looking to ultimately migrate to Windows 10 when the time is right, and they are confident the migration will proceed smoothly with ProfileUnity. They are also extremely comfortable with their relationship with the Liquidware Support Team and SEs, who went above and beyond to help in their transition from AppSense to ProfileUnity.

Note: This customer has agreed to provide a private reference to other potential customers upon specific request.



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