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[ What's New ]

## Agencies Plan for Desktop Virtualization

**The Coast Guard and Marine Corps hope this technology can help alleviate IT administration challenges.**

By Karen D. Schwartz

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With the federal government focus on systems modernization, technologies that help meet cost-cutting and energy-savings goals merit a closer look.

That's the case with desktop virtualization, which has the potential to simplify Coast Guard computing. "When you are underway floating, the less equipment you have to plug in and manage individually, the better," says Steve Verber, chief of the Coast Guard's enterprise information systems infrastructure branch.

"It's especially important that we try to reduce the IT-related workload on the ship's force," he says. "A few servers and 80 to 90 thin clients in a virtualized environment on a cutter would be a good way to go."

For more on desktop optimization, check out the [FedTech E-newsletter](#).

For these reasons, desktop virtualization is slowly but surely gaining steam throughout the federal government. Desktop virtualization can help agencies ease IT administration, says Chris Wolf, a senior analyst at Burton Group. "They are highly motivated to significantly reduce administrative-to-user ratios, and virtualization can go a long way toward doing that," he says.

But as attractive as that sounds, it's sometimes more easily said than done, especially when taking into account agencies' geographic diversity and security requirements. "We know that there are a lot of places where moving to thin clients and desktop virtualization makes sense, but we have a lot of challenges to overcome before we get there," Verber says. "Some of our units are at the end of very thin communications pipes, and we fall under DOD and DISA guidelines in terms of handling risks and vulnerabilities, which can complicate the situation."

Still, Verber expects that desktop virtualization efforts, where appropriate, will soon be under way throughout the Coast Guard. First up will be Coast Guard cutters, and over time, Verber expects the technology to be deployed in larger administrations and remote locations.

"In the Coast Guard, we have to update 50,000 to 60,000 terminal devices. It's a huge deal and creates the requirement either to accept risk or spend 24x7 patching and mitigating," he says. "It's about the ability to rapidly stand up systems that don't need to be patched and updated at the terminal end, and to create an environment where you can expand your scope by making a single change that affects hundreds of users."

### Matching Technology to Users

Desktop virtualization presents many potential benefits to the U.S. Marine Corps too, but the Corps is doing its due diligence before diving in. Before rolling out a pilot, commanding officers, in concert with Marine Corps Systems Command, evaluate potential technologies using a client framework that matches operational requirements with the Federal Desktop Core Configuration mandate.

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**\$2 billion:** Size of the desktop virtualization market by 2011.

Source: IDC

MCSC's client framework comprises delivery platforms, FDCC-compliant secure operating systems, and user profiles, applications and data.



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Maj. Carl Brodhun, MCSC's team lead for standards and technologies, says the goal is to add structure to the different requirements of diverse users, installations and network availability, matching the right technologies with the right situations at the right time. Depending on these factors, the correct choice may be a pure virtual desktop infrastructure, a network-managed desktop in a blade PC environment, or a partially connected desktop.

"The implementation of virtual desktops may be a great way to support fixed populations in fixed facilities or mobile users with ready access to broadband connections, but when you are dealing with Marines deployed in the field who lack the persistent network connectivity that VDI requires, you have to become more creative in how you are mixing and matching your technologies," Brodhun says.

More improvements in desktop virtualization are on the way, which Wolf says will really cause desktop virtualization adoption to take off. Chief among these enhancements is the client hypervisor, which increases flexibility and security while reducing back-end infrastructure. With this technology, users will be able to take their virtual desktops on the road and sync back to the organization's data center, creating something Wolf calls device-agnostic computing. Both VMware and Citrix are expected to ship client hypervisor solutions this year.

"It will run locally on the user's endpoint system instead of consuming server resources in the data center," Wolf explains. "You get the management benefits of desktop virtualization but you get a scale-out approach to architecture."



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going.

#### Deployment Do's and Don'ts

Desktop virtualization comes with myriad benefits, but as with all new technologies and processes, it takes time. Heed this advice:

- Do prepare users for the change. Many believe they will have less control, which creates resistance. Instead, accentuate the positive by explaining the increased flexibility they will gain. For example, they will be able to access their desktop from any location within the building.
- Don't dive in head first. Deploy slowly, and make sure you test the product with all applications before deployment. Deploy department by department instead of all at once.
- Do include representatives from each department to create the most usable, user-accepted desktop.
- Don't expect to implement desktop virtualization at every level of the organization; it's particularly well-suited to standardized tasks and situations, and somewhat less suited to users with more customized needs.

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