

Citrix to Corporate IT: Application Delivery Is Strategic

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The network vendor is pushing its first desktop virtualization offering and calling on application providers and system vendors to educate the market on the value of application acceleration.

Citrix Systems has made a bid to become a top-tier applications infrastructure provider by calling on enterprises to recognize the strategic value of the technologies that speed response times for Web-based or Windows desktop applications.

To bolster its message, Citrix on April 9 rallied a handful of applications providers and systems integrators to help educate the market on the strategic value of application acceleration and WAN optimization technologies and to introduce its first desktop virtualization offering, as well as the latest release of the NetScaler Web application delivery controller.

Application providers such as SAP, Oracle, Blackboard, Business Objects and Courion as well as systems vendors such as Hewlett-Packard and IBM voiced their support and approval of Citrix's application delivery infrastructure.

Citrix Systems' mission is to securely speed the performance and response time of applications, regardless of whether the applications are Web- or Windows-based or whether they are delivered as terminal services or streamed out to the desktop, the company said.

Toward that end, Citrix launched its Desktop Server Windows virtualization offering, code-named Trinity, which streams the desktop environment out to remote PCs over the network on demand.

The Citrix Desktop Server itself sits in front of VMware, Windows Terminal Server or blade PCs and delivers the desktop over the network. In most cases there is no operating system for the desktop, only a small-footprint client, according to Wes Wasson, vice president of worldwide marketing for Citrix, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "It's aimed at the office worker using a PC that doesn't leave the office in the initial phase. - But in the future - there will be different versions for different types of workers," Wasson said.

Desktop Server uses a dynamic delivery mechanism to automatically choose the right type of virtual desktop on demand, so that IT administrators can deliver the most appropriate desktop for each user based on his or her requirements.

Desktop server supports three different methods of installing desktop operating systems in the data center: as server-hosted virtual desktop infrastructure for information workers who use a range of different applications and want a customized desktop; as blade PCs for engineers and designers who use compute-heavy applications that require dedicated hardware in the data center; and as Windows Terminal Services for call center or clerical workers who share a similar desktop environment and use a limited number of applications.

Because the operating system runs in the data center, there is a minimal footprint on the desktop. "We think over time this model of delivering the desktop will surpass installing the physical software on a desktop," Wasson said.

The initial version competes with Microsoft's SoftGrid desktop

virtualization, acquired in 2006 with Softricity and the Altiris Software Virtualization Solution.

All three load "software from a remote server in chunks so the user can immediately start using it after the first 20 or 30 - megabytes - have come down," said Andi Mann, an industry analyst with Enterprise Management Associates.

"This is a technology I'm very excited about. It provides a lot of benefits to end users - they get their applications very quickly and easily, and there is little downtime. It's very good for administrators because they don't have to do complex provisioning. If it's done in the right way in isolation, there is very little conflict between applications on the desktop," Mann said.

"It raises the level of an anywhere work force, because it takes the distinction of being in or out of the office away," said Zeus Kerravala, an industry analyst with Yankee Group Research. "It runs the same in both environments. If a laptop dies the user doesn't lose anything," he said.

Desktop Server 1.0, which provides IT administrators with a centralized console that provides a common means for managing each type of desktop, is due in the second quarter.

Meanwhile, Citrix also bolstered its NetScaler application delivery controller's ability to better serve Web applications by adding in new security features and end-user activity monitoring.

NetScaler 8.0 integrates SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) VPN and Web application firewall technology to provide more secure application access and to better protect corporate data. It also incorporates end-user monitoring technology acquired with Reflectent Software to allow

customers to measure application performance according to what the end user experiences.

Citrix also announced its new AppExpert Policy framework, which makes it easier to set policies to match different application and user scenarios, and a new graphical policy configuration feature called AppExpert Visual Policy Builder. Citrix also added new AppExpert Developer APIs to allow third parties to create more programmatic ways to invoke policies. The APIs are based on the WSDL (Web Services Description Language).

However, that capability puts Citrix behind the curve compared to competitor F5 Networks, Kerravala said.

"Citrix needs to give guidance on what application environments it fits in or how it fits into application-specific environments. And they need to quantify the benefits - does Oracle on Citrix run better than Oracle on F5? They are playing catch-up with F5. F5's big advantage is Dev Central. The user community around it is like a movement," he said.

The new SSL VPN, Web application firewall and end-user monitoring functions plug into the AppExpert Policy Framework to give Web administrators better control over the Web application delivery process. The SSL VPN is an optional software module based on the Citrix Access Gateway technology.

NetScaler 8.0 is available now, although a separate Citrix NetScaler Platinum Edition with the EdgeSight end-user monitoring is not due until later in the second quarter. NetScaler 8.0 starts at \$17,500.

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