

A virtual boost is sought for PCs

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What if you didn't have a separate work computer to deal with anymore? Instead, you and your co-workers would use personal laptops to access work files and software - without having to download anything on your computer. It's part of the workplace future that Citrix Systems and Intel are working to make a reality.

Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based Citrix this month announced a partnership with Intel to create a new type of virtualization product. The idea behind virtualization is that an employee can tap into a secure "virtual" version of a workplace desktop from any computer that has this technology. So, if you use a home computer, software and files are not actually saved on your personal hard drive - they are saved within the company's virtual work desktop.

Virtualization technology already exists, but the two companies say this new product - called a Xen hypervisor - would be unique because it would come already built into the PC or laptop, thereby improving the performance and adoption of virtualization. The technology will roll out by midyear, but Intel hasn't said yet which computer manufacturers will include the hypervisor in their machines.

"Although it's in the market right now, this type of solution hasn't taken off because of the security issues," said Ian Pratt, vice president of advanced products at Citrix. He explained in a conference call that by building this technology inside computers, it would eliminate security issues as well as improve the user's work experience. And it would save IT staff members from dealing with the hassle of managing every

employee's desktop computer.

So, if you want a program like iTunes or Skype on your computer, there would be no one telling you it's against company policy to download it, since the work desktop environment is separated.

"This kind of solution greatly reduces the cost of enterprising in managing laptops and desktops and keeping those laptops up to date," Pratt said. "You know you're not going to have any hardware compatibility problems."

And ideally in time, it could mean people have the ability to tap into their work computers from any device with this technology _ even a smartphone.

"You'll be able to access your corporate desktop from whatever device is most convenient at the time, just like e-mail is today," said Raj Dhingra, group vice president and general manager of Citrix.

Citrix has started to do this with about 300 of its employees, and gave employees a \$2,100 stipend to buy their own laptop with a hypervisor, Dhingra said.

He added that BYOC (bring your own computer) has been well received and that employees have been more productive.

Chris Wolf, senior analyst at Burton Group, said it's not a matter of whether this will take off, but when.

"I think it'll become more mainstream by 2012," Wolf said. "I think it's going to happen relatively quickly. It's flexibility that you never really had before. That's pretty exciting stuff now. My computer is always going to follow me wherever I go in the world."

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