

# Consumerisation

## Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

Many businesses are looking to refresh or transform their desktop environment by adopting utility computing and virtualisation. Advances in both the underlying technology and service quality means that organisations can now virtualise across the majority of the IT estate – i.e. the desktop (DaaS); the applications (SaaS); computing platform and/or solution stack (PaaS); and back-up, disaster recovery and storage (IaaS).

Moving to a utility computing model can reduce the level of migratory risk and drive down costs as firms look to move to Windows 7 – either to comply with regulatory mandates or benefit from favourable licence agreements. At the same time, a fresh wave of IT transformation is underway as enterprises try to accommodate the growing number of employees bringing their own devices into work, as well as benefit from the rise in social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter.

This year has seen rapid expansion of business change driven by the 'social customer', empowered employees and a convergence of new technical capabilities. According to IDC, 40 per cent of devices such as PCs, smartphones and tablets are now owned by employees, while 41 per cent of firms have some sort of social business initiative underway.

But while technology continues to morph and evolve at break-neck speed, IT professionals face exactly the same kind of challenge they did when the personal computing revolution first began. Essentially, it comes down to the question of how to retain control over the use of corporate IT assets, comply with regulatory mandates around security and privacy of data while at the same time meeting rising user expectations with regards connectivity, flexible ways of working and rich media as devices and networks become more personal and social.

## From green to virtual screen

Back in the '80s when personal computers began to replace green screen terminals, users had to get to grips with a revolutionary graphical user interface (GUI) known as 'WYSIWYG' (what you see is what you get) and allowing them to select icons from a display screen. They also had to be trained in using another revolutionary leap in the man-machine interface – the 'X-Y Position Indicator for a Display System' – otherwise known as a 'mouse'!

In came word processing, spreadsheets, files and folders; out went typed commands and lumbering mainframes. Hardware could now be upgraded more easily, storage media became more portable and the desktop environment could be personalised. Users were now able to upload photographs to their computer and display them on screen as their desktop 'wallpaper' and, as email and then the web entered the mix, businesses were forced to implement more policies and controls that could limit what users were able to access, change and configure.

Certainly, there is synergy here with the way in which social media has emerged as a new channel for businesses to both communicate with other businesses and engage with consumers. Firms need to educate their users in how best to exploit this channel while adhering to the proper disciplines and controls built around conventional corporate applications.

Similarly, tablet PCs, personal laptops and smart phones are increasingly being used as productivity tools irrespective of whether they have the support of the IT department or senior management. These devices also need to be integrated within the confines of the corporate environment, given that this wave of IT consumerisation is a now a case of 'when' and not 'if'.

*Consumerisation, cloud computing and virtualisation are transforming corporate networks, but for IT professionals tasked with managing this change, the underlying challenges remain the same as when the personal computing revolution first got underway.*

*Centralis MD Ewen Anderson discusses why a well-known saying in France still rings true for IT professionals managing the new wave of IT transformation.*



# Consumerisation...

## The more things change the more they stay the same

Firms are responding to IT consumerisation with security and usage policies designed to allow employees more freedom in moving between devices. Yet significant tensions remain because the level of security demanded by IT teams can often lock-down devices (particularly laptops) to the extent they are rendered barely usable. And if firms are overly restrictive, employees can often react badly, refusing to work flexibly or by finding workarounds that mean potentially sensitive data leaves the confines of corporate IT and becomes both a security risk and a potential breach in regulatory compliance.

Although the technologies employed within the corporate IT environment are making giant strides forward, the fundamental rub is that the applications used by individuals to perform their work roles are still largely the same as when Windows first burst onto the scene – namely business administration systems, spreadsheets, word processing and email. Moreover, the majority of workplaces continue to be predicated on a 1980s computing culture – i.e. there is a desktop computer, a keyboard, a monitor and telephone – and the employee is expected to sit there and do their job.

Like the employee, full access to many corporate applications and sensitive data has remained tethered to the PC, with certain types of websites often restricted and social media most likely blocked altogether. The corporate IT function is therefore often perceived as a cross between a traffic warden and a cowboy builder – restricting users from legitimate activities and, when they do try to fix something, doing a poor job that takes way too long and often makes things worse.

In France there is a well-known epigram 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose' that, roughly translated, says: 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'. This continues to ring true for the IT professionals tasked with managing the large-scale IT transformations now underway in the corporate environment. The difference this time round is that the scale of change is simply too great for the IT function to control using conventional approaches.

## Enabling choice and change

For too long, firms have used policy to identify the elements of the corporate IT environment they are supposed to control and to define what is appropriate in terms of acceptable usage. Naturally, they must take reasonable steps to monitor and prevent the intrusion of unauthorised devices, applications and data onto the corporate network, but this has become increasingly difficult as end users today require a variety of information and tools to perform process-driven roles.

With Microsoft Windows 8 on the horizon, a new generation of operating system is waiting in the wings. Designed for use with touch-sensitive displays and rich multimedia applications, information feeds and streamed video content, this platform means businesses will have to cope with even more potential distractions for employees. It is therefore critical that IT teams establish the broadest sense of what their organisation believes it should be delivering to users and to be able to align the corporate desktop environment with the organisation at a cultural, technology and operational level.

By its very definition, an element of risk has to be introduced if users are to be given flexible access to information. Consumerisation therefore becomes a question of how organisations configure and manage the interface between the user and the device, as well as how much control it retains over the devices being used and the data being accessed. The solution lies in finding an appropriate way of managing the device to ensure that all data is encrypted, that the device has an anti-virus solution and that there is an acceptable usage policy applied that also makes provisions for a certain amount of personal usage.

IT departments need to learn to market themselves as the enabler of choice and change. Meanwhile, organisations need to confront the spread of disruptive technology, link their application and desktop strategy to their operational and strategic plans and align this with a communications strategy that promotes employee understanding and buy-in and ensures their expectations and needs are being met.

In doing so, users of that technology will be much more satisfied with what they are given if it is delivered as a service, branded under corporate identity and above all, meets their needs à la carte (to borrow another French phrase). As a new generation of users enters the market with social media and 'always on' tattooed into their being, failure to provide them with an environment that enables them to combine their device of choice, their personal life and work will restrict who is recruited and who stays. And without a strategic approach to consumerisation, it will be like trying to stop the rapid spread of PCs in the 1990s.

*For more information about how Centralis strategic consulting service helps organisations respond to consumerisation and change I.T. for the better, please contact us on 01564 795911*

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