

Virtual Iron, Provision Networks Take on Desktop Virtualization

The two companies are looking to create a low-cost alternative for enterprises looking to consolidate clients onto virtual machines.

Virtual Iron, which has long billed itself as a cost-effective producer of virtualization software, is looking to delve into desktop virtualization for the first time.

Starting April 16, Virtual Iron will partner with Provision Networks, which uses VDI (virtual desktop infrastructure) technology to transform physical PCs and applications into a virtual service, to provide a bundled software suite to monitor and deploy virtual desktops throughout an enterprise.

This software bundle will use Virtual Iron's enterprise platform to create individual profiles within a server's virtualized environment and deliver these profiles to front-room thin clients using Provision's Virtual Access Suite technology.

The end result, said Mike Grandinetti, chief marketing officer for Virtual Iron, is that IT managers can monitor and control a fleet of thin client machines from a single console, while allowing for individual desktop profiles for employees.

The new software bundle will support both Microsoft's Windows XP and the newer Vista operating system. The product will be sold through both Virtual Iron's and Provision's channel at a cost of \$120 per desk. Virtual Iron, which is based in Lowell, Mass., will provide support.

"What this offers is better manageability and vastly better security," Grandinetti said. "What it also does is save on systems administration time. So, instead of having to upgrade and manage thousands or tens of thousands of clients, most changes and upgrades can be done from a few servers."

John Humphreys, an analyst with IDC, said desktop virtualization is the next logical step for companies such as Virtual Iron, XenSource and VMware that are already producing virtualization technology for x86 servers. Enterprises and smaller businesses are also interested in the technology since it adds security and cuts down the labor associated with managing a large fleet of PCs.

The unique part of Virtual Iron's desktop offering, Humphreys said, is that its integrating with a specific connection broker, namely Provision.

"Unlike VMware, Virtual Iron has picked a specific broker and has tightly bundled the two technologies together," Humphreys said. "By integrating these together, Virtual Iron is making it appealing to customers."

Desktop virtualization also requires enterprise customers willing to invest in thin clients.

Thin clients, which provide front-end workers with a monitor, mouse and keyboard but have their memory, operating system and application run from a backroom server, have in the past been a niche part of the PC market place. However, growing concerns about security and the ability to run multiple thin clients from servers have turned these machines into a much more attractive option for businesses.

Hewlett-Packard, which has become a much larger player in the thin-client market, introduced a new line of these machines earlier this year.

In April 2006, VMware, the world's leading virtualization company and one of Virtual Iron's main rivals, announced that it would create a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure Alliance to help promote the use of virtual

desktops.

Coincidentally, Provision is part of VMware's desktop virtualization alliance.

Unlike terminal service or individual, desktop-hosted virtualization, the Virtual Iron and Provision bundle allows for customers to deploy desktop virtualization on a large scale throughout an enterprise, while being able to create containers that hold individual images.

Provision's Virtual Access Suite then allows administrator to create policies and rules for accessing these images through thin clients. It also provides for security measures such as user authentication, said Paul Ghostine, CEO of Provision, in Reston, Va.

The two companies also believe that since most PCs used in enterprises are not able to support the graphics-intensive features found in the Vista OS, the bundled solution will help the IT department install Vista throughout an enterprise without having to install it on individual desktops and ensuring that all the PCs can support the new OS.

The bundle solution has the ability to support up to 10 virtual desktops per CPU, although Ghostine said that number could go higher or lower depending on the type of applications the users needs.

The two companies believe this type of technology will find a home in verticals such as call centers and health-care facilities, such as hospitals.

With the cost of not only buying traditional desktops and the maintenance that goes into keep a fleet of PCs running in an enterprise, executives with both Virtual Iron and Provision said the cost of their bundled solution will appeal to cash-conscious businesses.

"While they can be complementary in many instances, server-hosted virtual desktops offer a compelling viable alternative for large-scale adoption," Ghostine said. "This solution is able to provide a better return on investment and it eliminates many of the issues and complexities found with traditional server-based computing solutions."

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