CONCENTRA

HP Thin Clients help to enable simple desktop management, cost efficiency

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HP CUSTOMER CASE STUDY: Concentra chooses HP Thin Clients to provide access to centralized applications

INDUSTRY:
Health care

OBJECTIVE:
Provide efficient, secure, easy-to-manage computing solution for a multi-site health care company

APPROACH:
Concentra chose to equip users with HP Thin Clients that are used to access server-based applications and storage

IT IMPROVEMENTS:
• Easy application management
• Added security through centralized data storage and use of Windows® Embedded enhanced write filter to eliminate malware

BUSINESS BENEFITS:
• Efficient hardware replacement cycle enhancing user productivity
• Support staff and costs minimized through centralized management with HP Device Manager
• Automatic data storage at the network eliminates lost files and lost efficiency
• Cost-efficient solution with benefits of HP Financial Services leasing

Concentra, a subsidiary of Humana Inc., is a national health care company with facilities in 40 states. It concluded several years ago that centralized, server-based applications would best serve its needs, and that the best way to provide access to those applications was through thin clients.

Now it is standardizing on HP t5740 Thin Clients and HP 4320t Mobile Thin Clients based on their value, reliability, and the minimal support they require.

"We periodically challenge all our old assumptions and re-evaluate the technology," says John deLorimier, chief marketing and sales officer for Concentra. "We look at different vendors, their systems, and try to ensure we're on the best technology to meet our needs. When it comes to the technology we put into users' hands, that technology is HP."

TECHNOLOGY EVOLVES TOWARD THIN CLIENTS

Concentra is a national health care company with more than 300 medical centers in 40 states that provide occupational medicine, urgent care, physical therapy and wellness services. It also operates more than 240 workplace health clinics that provide athletic training programs, health screenings, vaccinations, medical advisory services and more.

Early on, the company maintained records on paper. Then it moved to desktop PCs running local applications. But as it grew into a regional, and then national company, Concentra needed to improve its efficiency. A centralized computing and records-keeping solution was the logical solution.

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"When demand for your service grows faster than you had anticipated, you start hiring people to do things that should be automated instead," says deLorimier. "We moved to a centralized solution in order to increase productivity and cut error rates."

Employees in medical clinics throughout the United States used Compaq Desktop PCs to run Concentra's custom, proprietary applications and update patient records. But maintaining local desktops scattered across hundreds of locations presented a monumental challenge for a small IT staff, says Bob Nine, assistant vice president for technical support.

CUSTOMER SOLUTION AT A GLANCE

PRIMARY APPLICATIONS
Specialized health-care applications

PRIMARY HARDWARE
- HP t5740 Thin Client
- HP 4320t Mobile Thin Client

PRIMARY SOFTWARE
- Windows® Embedded Standard
- Microsoft® Office
- Citrix ICA
- Lotus Note
- Occusource medical practice management system
- ChartSource medical charting software

"It was difficult to keep technology standardized and up-to-date on every desktop. Every time we updated an application, we had to multiply the effort to each user," he says. "As the user base grows, that approach becomes less and less efficient."

So the decision was made to centralize many of the company's applications, running them on servers in the company's headquarters. "We started using Citrix to give employees nationwide access to the applications. At that point, it only made sense to move to thin clients," says deLorimier.

WHY THIN CLIENTS?

Among Concentra's reasons for choosing thin clients:

Low hardware cost. deLorimier estimates Concentra saves hundreds of dollars per device with thin clients. Because they have no hard drive or moving parts, thin clients also typically last a long time.

Easy application management. Concentra may update its applications twice a month. Updating thousands of individual units was time-consuming while updates at the server are done easily and quickly with enhanced consistency.

Support efficiency. By centrally managing applications, Concentra reduces the ratio of IT support staff to users. That makes the thin client solution highly scalable. Concentra can add groups of new users—as it does when it acquires a smaller business—with minimal impact on support requirements.

Enhance productivity. With thin clients, hardware issues have a single, simple resolution: swapping a new unit for the old one. That's a big advantage from the previous three-day cycle to ship, fix, and return. "With a thin client, I can ship out a replacement immediately and the user will have it and be fully functioning the next day," Nine says.

Because data is all stored centrally in Concentra's data center, the thin client solution also reduces lost productivity due to hardware problems. "We don't have to worry about hard drives or users not backing up their data," Nine says. "It's an old story—the user has two years of data on a device, something happens and it's gone. They never backed it up, never put it on a network drive, and they're lost without it."

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Condense bandwidth needs. With applications processing taking place on the server, the user only receives enough data to paint the screen. "If you have a 'chatty' application—one that's bandwidth intensive and hits the database frequently, you get better performance by keeping the computation in the server," says deLorimier. "With Citrix, we only transmit the screen image to the thin client, so we keep our bandwidth requirements and wide area network costs down."

Added security. Data is securely stored in Concentra's data center. Loss or theft of a thin client won't put patient data at risk, which is critical to Concentra's ability to meet HIPAA confidentiality requirements. "It's a nightmare when someone calls in and says, 'I lost my laptop at the airport,'" Nine says.

In addition, Concentra uses the Enhanced Write Filtering feature of Windows® Embedded to ensure that, when users reboot the thin client, viruses and malware will be eliminated.

THIN CLIENTS SUCCEED IN THE FIELD

Today thin clients are used in all of Concentra's medical clinics and billing offices. The company has nearly 5,000 thin clients deployed. The most recent version is the HP t5740 Thin Client.

They are configured with 2 GB each of RAM and flash memory, and Windows XP Embedded. Users use Citrix software to login to server-based applications including Lotus Notes, Microsoft® Office, Occusource medical practice management system, ChartSource medical charting software, and proprietary applications developed and maintained by Concentra.

"With any internally developed application we frequently have to patch, update and upgrade it," Nine says. "The Citrix environment lets us do that quickly."

Many users with the t5740 thin client have dual monitors. "It's an easy way for a user to bridge two dissimilar systems," says deLorimier. "Rather than printing something out from one application and then keying it into another, the user can easily view and work with both applications at once."

When the company deploys a team to a customer site for medical screenings, employees are equipped with HP 4320t Mobile Thin Clients. "Imagine a team of 10 people going in with five or six computers," deLorimier says. "In the past, they had to take monitors, keyboards and mouses. Now they have all the functionality they need with a robust thin client and the convenience of a notebook."

WHY HP?

In addition to the value and reliability that Concentra expects from HP products, one of the primary reasons it chose HP Thin Clients is the inclusion of HP Device Manager management software. HP Device Manager allows Concentra's IT staff to track, configure, upgrade, clone and manage thousands of thin clients. It automates management tasks to reduce day-to-day maintenance.

"Device Manager is a huge value for an organization like ours that is so fully committed to thin client computing," deLorimier notes.

His advice to corporate managers who are reluctant to try thin clients: "Challenge them. They might have to learn to think differently." One of the biggest obstacles he faced was people who said they needed a fat client in order to work while on an airplane.

Well, he has an answer for that. "With a mobile thin client and virtual desktop infrastructure, that user could check out a virtual system and store it on a big flash drive. Go on the airplane, use it on the flight, and then re-connect with our servers later to store that information.

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