

EMB ensures personalized virtual desktops with AppSense



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Greg Matuskovic
IT Director for EMB North America.



EMB is a leading actuarial firm, providing expert consulting and software across all areas of property casualty insurance. Statistical analysis is an essential part of the service EMB provides to its customers, from determining insurance

pricing for the year to come, to calculating how much money should be held in reserve to pay out claims. Calculating these statistics requires complex analysis of significant reserves of historical data. The applications used to process this data are extremely resource intensive, requiring high levels of computing power in order to provide the highest quality service to clients in a timely manner.

BACKGROUND CHALLENGES

EMB America consultants have traditionally used datacenter server farms with dedicated resources. The company's bank of 15 terminal servers powered the CPU and RAM intensive applications, but Microsoft® Windows® was struggling to allocate resources properly when multiple consultants attempted to run the applications at the same time.

Greg Matuskovic, IT Director for EMB in North America explains,

“If four or more users are working on a single terminal server, trying to run our applications at the same time, run times could potentially slow by 80 percent. When an application crashed the server due to human error or bad data, all users would lose their connection and be back to square one.”

Matuskovic explains,

“There had to be better ways to allocate system resources to our users more efficiently.”

EMB America needed a systems overhaul in order to maximize available computing power, minimize IT administration, reduce logon times and ensure actuarial applications ran efficiently.

THE VIRTUAL DESKTOP SOLUTION

In its search for a solution, EMB America spoke to both Citrix and VMware.

Matuskovic explains,

“We went with VMware's virtual desktop solution because it enabled us to isolate the system resources per virtual machine instead of sharing it across multiple users. It also allowed us to pool resources together so users did not have to know which machines to connect to; VMware handled it all. Each user can log into a pool of virtual machines and be allocated the specific resources they need without sharing with others.”

By implementing VMware VDI (virtual desktop infrastructure), EMB America was able to cluster server resources together and allocate them appropriately to the users, well suited to cope with the heavy application load.

As Matuskovic points out,

“Most companies that employ virtualization use mostly Microsoft Office applications and other lower end applications. In comparison, most of our consultants' virtual machines are configured with 4 or 8 GB of RAM and with two to four processors in order to run our applications. We really give them a workout!”

Virtualization solved the issue of resource availability, but the challenge that faced EMB America now was one of user acceptance. Having multiple pools of virtual desktops that a user can access meant that no user has their own personal desktop.

Challenge

- > Maximize available computing power to consultants
- > Ensure user acceptance of virtual desktops
- > Minimize IT administration
- > Ensure actuarial applications run efficiently
- > Reduce long logon times

Solution

- > AppSense Environment Manager
- > On-demand personalization of pooled virtual desktops
- > Consistent and personal experience without scripting
- > Policy and personalization management

Benefits

- > No roaming profile issues
- > Flexibility in virtual desktop allocation
- > Maximum use of server resources
- > Better than expected user experience
- > Reduced logon times

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Matuskovic explains the problem,

“One of our users can log onto between three and six different machines at once. We wanted to keep a consistent user experience across all of those machines. We tried roaming profiles but that only lasted a month as they proved to be a resource and time drain, increasing logon times by duplicating user information across the network. We would constantly have to remove corrupt roaming profiles and start from scratch, which was frustrating our users. Roaming profiles were not cutting it, so we looked for a third party solution that would allow for profile personalization and replication and I came across AppSense Environment Manager.”

THE INTRODUCTION OF APPSENSE

EMB America installed AppSense Environment Manager as the solution to their consistency and personalization requirements. AppSense Environment Manager takes all the user's settings, including application and operating system personal settings, and manages that information independent of the desktop. When a user accesses a virtual desktop from any device, information about that user is

streamed to the desktop on demand. The user sees a consistent desktop, fully personalized to their own preferences without the need for cumbersome profiles or complex scripting.

“In order to achieve user acceptance of the move to VDI we needed to make sure the virtual environment looked just like a physical desktop - just without the performance issues. The AppSense solution actually performed better than we ever imagined. Crucially, AppSense Environment Manager does what roaming profiles could not achieve. It allows our consultants to work on multiple machines using one profile without impacting stability. We now run AppSense on all our virtual machines,”

said Matuskovic.

Looking to the future, Matuskovic is optimistic that AppSense will continue to meet the needs of EMB,

“As our company continues to expand globally, AppSense will allow us to continue to be flexible in virtual desktop allocation. It maximizes the use of server resources and, most importantly, enhances the overall user experience.”

NETWORK ENVIRONMENT

- > Nine VMware ESX servers clustered using a fiber storage array
- > Typically 8 GB RAM and dual processor per VM
- > 5 specialized resource-intensive actuarial applications

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- > Learn more, please visit www.appsense.com
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+1 212 597 5500

