

Case study

AppSense Citrix upgrade for Accountants International



“AppSense enabled us to optimize server workload density levels to meet our benchmark requirements after our migration from Citrix 3.0 to Citrix 4.5 a more feature rich but resource intensive version. Prior to implementing AppSense Performance Manager the upgrade was not proving viable.”

Donald Wong
IT Operations and Development Manager

Introduction

Accountants International, a Randstad company formerly known as Accountants Inc, Acsys Inc, and AccountPros provides accounting and finance recruitment and staffing to businesses across America. Accountants International has over 20 years' experience and operates in over 50 offices across the United States.

During the merger logistics Accountants International's IT support team consolidated systems across three data centres in Burlingame CA, Atlanta GA and Boston MA, supporting around 500 staff members beginning last quarter 2008 through 2009.

Background challenges

Accountants International now utilizes Citrix as its day-to-day desktop with the exception of the corporate office which is on a standard local Microsoft Windows desktop. During the data center consolidation they migrated the Boston and Atlanta desktops to Citrix. Employees access their three different staffing business applications that integrate with Windows Office 2003 and Internet Explorer usage for business purposes is higher than most companies, as access to customer sites and job boards is a key part of their staff's role.

The migration from Citrix XenApp 3.0 to version 4.5 allowed Accountants International to take advantage of improved compatibility for new application versions and overall system stability in support of the consolidation. In addition, Accountants International simultaneously extended their virtualization platform in an effort to reduce the company's hardware footprint and to consolidate all hardware and software into one data center.

During the Citrix upgrade Accountants International hit upon a major roadblock. When running Citrix XenApp 3.0 in a physical server environment it was averaging 30-40 users per server. Moving to Citrix XenApp 4.5 running on a virtualized VMware ESX server, the IT team was struggling to get a consistent number of users comfortably onto each server.

IT Operations and Development Manager Donald Wong explains “Using the new Citrix/VMware set-up we found there was no real average for how many users we could support per server. Numbers fluctuated wildly but it was usually fewer than 12 and never more than 18 - both a considerable drop from our previous average of 30-40 users per server.”

The introduction of AppSense

After discussing the potential benefits of AppSense Performance Manager, Entisys and Wong moved quickly to see the software in action on a test server. Wong's reaction was unambiguous “With AppSense Performance Manager running on just one Citrix XenApp server, we were blown away by the difference it immediately made to workload density - and that was before we had tuned any of the settings! We saw a 50 percent increase in the number of users we could get onto each server without even tailoring anything to our own settings.”

AppSense Performance Manager optimizes application and user environments to ensure maximum hardware utilization with an optimal, consistent quality of service. AppSense Performance Manager identifies ‘hungry’ applications that consume excessive amounts of server space or have erratic resource requirements and limits the capacity available to them.



Challenges

- Make Citrix XenApp 4.5 upgrade viable by increasing workload density on each server

Solution

- AppSense Performance Manager

Benefits

- 60 percent increase in users per Citrix server

AppSense.com
iwanttoknowmore@AppSense.com

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Using AppSense Performance Manager, Wong and AppSense engineers identified that the primary culprit hogging capacity on Accountants International’s Citrix servers was Internet Explorer. Many of the sites accessed on a daily basis incorporate a lot of Flash or Quicktime animation, adding further to the already volatile requirements of the application. Curbing user access to Internet Explorer would not have been a viable solution, so using Performance Manager to clamp down on available resources made perfect sense.

Wong explains; “AppSense Performance Manager showed us exactly how much resource every user and application was consuming at any one time. When one user on the server loaded up Internet Explorer everyone else slowed down while the application consumed the majority of the processing resource. With the ability to identify and control Explorer utilization, we could provide and maintain an acceptable experience level for all users at all times.”

With AppSense solving the final roadblock to the Citrix/VMware upgrade migration, Accountants International has now been running in a virtualized Citrix environment over the last year with the final data center consolidated at the end of 2009. Performance Manager ensures that each server is currently averaging 25 simultaneous Citrix user sessions.

Future plans

With the rollout of AppSense Performance Manager proving such a success, Wong is also talking to Entisys and AppSense about the benefits offered in the newest release of AppSense Performance Manager v8.0. Accountants International is also looking to upgrade to XenApp 6.0 to support our migration to a single business application across the enterprise.

Network environment

We went from over 75 physical Dell servers to 25. Out of the 25, 20 are VMware ESX servers Dell and HP Desktop PCs and HP Thin Clients.

About AppSense

We are the leading provider of user virtualization technology to enterprise organizations. User virtualization is a way of managing user-specific information independent of the desktop, and applying this information into any desktop (local install, virtualized, published, streamed etc) on-demand. This enables IT to standardize the desktop build, automate desktop and application delivery, and migrate users to new desktops – all while ensuring the user experience is seamless, personal, predictable and easily manageable.