

Case study

Money Management International ensures optimal user environments with AppSense



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Matt Jarrell
IT Systems and Services Director, MMI

Background

Money Management International (MMI) is a national, full-service provider of consumer credit counseling services (CCCS), offering confidential financial guidance and debt management assistance since 1958. Counselors at MMI's 140 nationwide locations assist over 180,000 people by providing free credit counseling. Technology plays a major role in bringing MMI's tools and services to clients on a local level.

Round-the-clock system control without impacting user experience

New federal bankruptcy regulations require anyone wanting to declare bankruptcy must first undergo bankruptcy counseling. As one of only a few agencies in the country authorized to provide this service, MMI is experiencing tremendous growth. Ensuring security of clients' confidential financial information is vitally important, and had been equally challenging with MMI's expanding employee base.

24x7 operations

As critical as it was to secure MMI's network and applications, it was also critical that system stability and performance was never impacted by unauthorized software. According to Matt Jarrell, IT systems and services director at MMI Real-time virus scanning, which is a reactive approach to determining if systems have been affected, negatively impacted server performance. And, because MMI services are available 24x7, even running scans in the middle of the night affected end-users.

“To avoid performance impacts you'd have to turn off the real-time scanning, which defeats the purpose of anti-virus software in the first place,” Jarrell said.

Balancing compliance with user needs

MMI's IT department is adamant about preventing unauthorized applications and plug-ins from running. MMI needed to ensure nothing could affect the integrity and privacy of consumer information without forcing a zero-tolerance policy that could stifle productivity. However, with users ranging from counselors and sales people to philanthropy and other non-operational personnel, MMI also realized they needed a way to provide access to a wide array of business applications for a broad constituency of users.

Growing number of counselors

Complicating matters was the agency's expanding base of counselors that remotely accessed applications and data that resided on Citrix servers in MMI's headquarters. Providing efficient support from central IT can be a huge challenge when users are geographically dispersed. MMI needed to minimize the chances of system interruptions, while providing service to an expanding base of users.

Server resources: cpu & memory-hogging applications

Applications such as WebEx require a significant and unpredictable amount of CPU and memory resource. If too many people on the same Citrix server use it at the same time, it could take down the machine and critical applications such as Money Management Software, MMI's home-grown application for supporting its clients.



Challenges

- Ensure quality of service
- Prevent unauthorized applications
- Keep high control of system

Solution

- AppSense Management Suite on Citrix servers serving 700 concurrent users.

Benefits

- Improved quality of service
- Eliminate security risks without patching
- Enable compliance while meeting end-user expectations

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“AppSense has made it easy to secure our growing, widely distributed user base without any impact on system performance. We’re confident that nothing is running on our systems that hasn’t been authorized to do so, and that no malware will be able to harm our applications or compromise our clients’ confidential financial information.”

Matt Jarrell,
IT Systems and Services Director, MMI

Enhanced system protection and improved quality of service

MMI needed a fail-safe, proactive way to secure its environment, which could be easily administered and meet its high-performance needs. AppSense provided the ideal solution. Today, MMI leverages the capabilities of AppSense solutions to:

Protect the system

When MMI first installed AppSense its goal was to prevent people from using unauthorized applications so individuals would not affect one another. AppSense made it easy for MMI to completely secure its application environment using AppSense Application Manager. As a result, problems such as unknown software and viruses are totally eliminated.

“Nothing gets through with AppSense Application Manager on our servers. It was great testing AppSense against savvy viruses and worms, and not being able to get any of them to execute. This is definitely a much more proactive approach to protection,” Jarrell said.

Improve quality of service

In addition to enhancing performance by eliminating unauthorized applications, MMI also implemented AppSense Performance Manager to manage and optimize CPU, memory and disk resources and ensure applications respond to user needs.

“The whole idea is that 1 or 2 people should not be able to take out the rest of the team. Each user should feel like ‘this is my Citrix server and I’m the only one on it.’ That’s exactly what AppSense enables us to do. We no longer hear complaints about the system being too slow,” Jarrell noted.

Profile management

One particularly beneficial capability of the AppSense Environment Manager is to replace the need for large, cumbersome roaming profiles and instead stream user personal settings on demand. This revolutionary process prevents large amounts of data from being loaded and unloaded at user logon and logoff, which in turn reduces logon times and dramatically reduces the chance of profile corruption.

Technical overview

Networking Environment:

- 14 Citrix XenApp Servers
- HP ProLiant DL360 Servers
- 700 concurrent users
- AppSense Management Suite

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.