“Clinicians get the information they need faster, which reduces clinical risk. It helps us deliver better, faster support. We love it. And we know there’s much more we can do with AppSense.”

Rachel Dunscombe, Bolton NHS Foundation Trust CIO

Bolton NHS Foundation Trust makes AppSense the linchpin of its Virtual Desktop Infrastructure

Bolton NHS Foundation Trust, a UK-based integrated care organization, offers patient care in the community at more than 20 health centers and clinics including the Royal Bolton Hospital. With a staff of over 4,000 and more than 600 beds, The Trust accommodates more than 100,000 Accident and Emergency attendances and 750,000 community attendances a year.

From an IT perspective, The Trust exceeds the complexity of many business environments. It supports nearly 300 clinical applications, all of which involve potential risk in terms of patient care. That means zero tolerance for data loss or application downtime. Moreover, 40-plus community sites depend on The Trust’s IT infrastructure as well as 4,000 users at the hospital. “The community sites needed a lot of help” notes Bolton NHS Foundation Trust CIO, Rachel Dunscombe. “Their virtualized desktops were more than a decade old. And we also inherited a lot of old desktop equipment. Our first order of business was to bring them into the modern world, primarily VDI and Windows 7, so that clinicians could have a consistent experience no matter where they accessed patient information.”

“But there was no way we could do a Big Bang roll out of Windows 7. The disruption would have potentially impacted patient care,” continues Brett Walmsley, Bolton NHS Foundation Trust’s CTO. “So, we needed something that would allow users to move between desktops as easily as possible while we gradually went through the migration from XP to Windows 7.”

AppSense - The only solution for the job

Initially, The Trust chose AppSense only for its value in simplifying and streamlining the migration to Windows 7. “Because we’d been working with AppSense DesktopNow to manage user profiles, we didn’t have to research the market and do a proof of concept,” explains Dunscombe. “We could prove that it could do the job.”

Nevertheless, The Trust’s IT team soon realized that AppSense had much more to offer. “It did more than we expected,” observes Walmsley. “In fact, we changed our five and ten-year plans based on the functionality it could offer in supporting our deployment of the virtual desktop.”

The Trust’s new roadmap calls for a fully mobile, virtual desktop where every aspect of the environment will be streamed, with AppSense binding all the elements together. “We want to have full desktop virtualization using Citrix XenDesktop 7.6 to do the desktop brokering and Microsoft App-V for application delivery,” says Walmsley.

Adding value to Microsoft App-V

The Trust uses Microsoft App-V to make applications available to users without installing them directly on users PCs. But not all applications virtualize equally well. For example, The Trust’s digital dictation application streams data and settings through a virtual desktop to virtual storage. “We’ve had trouble with the desktop application,” Walmsley comments, “never mind putting it in a virtual environment. The way it stores voice and data has to be fast and reliable. It can’t be missing parts.” With AppSense, The Trust successfully virtualized the application, while improving logon speed and increasing functionality.
Likewise, AppSense helped successfully virtualize the mobile pharmacy application. “With AppSense, you can recognize different virtual desktops sessions and access points,” adds Walmsley. “It recognizes a disconnected session. So when a clinician changes location, AppSense can safely redirect the session settings, correctly remap printers, and eliminate any potential clinical issues.”

Simplifying patch management

Before AppSense, every Microsoft “patch Tuesday” brought days of frustration. Thirty percent of patches would fail on average, often requiring complete machine rebuilds. “We had two-and-a-half to three thousand desktops spread over 40 sites, with different versions of everything,” Walmsley recalls. “Plus a legacy virtualized server farm,” Dunscombe adds. Now that The Trust has moved to highly standardized virtual desktops and applications, patching is fast and problem-free. Users still enjoy a personalized desktop experience, but IT inefficiencies were eliminated and the window of exposure to unpatched security vulnerabilities was greatly reduced.

Although one, non-persistent desktop is the ideal, Walmsley realizes that there may be exceptions. “The idea is not to have one monolithic desktop, which leads to complexity,” muses Walmsley. “but, if something can't be virtualized, it will have to go on the desktop where AppSense can control access and configuration settings.”

Right now, only two or three out of 40 applications fit in that category. “Everything else gets streamed in,” Walmsley says. “Virtualization reduces the impact of the updates. Now they're nearly instantaneous.”

Avoiding the “nightmare”

The Trust’s use of AppSense went far beyond its Windows 7 migration, AppSense made that initiative much more manageable and cost effective. “We couldn’t have done it without AppSense. End of story!” emphasizes Walmsley. “To do it as a Big Bang would have required at least 30 percent more in terms of staff,” Dunscombe notes. “Plus it would have been too risky and too costly with potential impacts on patient safety and clinical staff productivity, which was a non-starter for us.”

From impairing the mobility and productivity of clinicians to isolating machines between clinics and health centers depending on the stage of the migration, it would have been as Walmsley sums up, “a nightmare.”

Across the board, the deployment of AppSense has been a success. “It’s allowed us to deliver a much more personalized experience to each user, while simplifying policy and application management,” concludes Beaumont. “Clinicians get the information they need faster, which reduces clinical risk. It helps us deliver better, faster support. We love it. And we know there’s much more we can do with AppSense.”

About AppSense

AppSense is the global leader in user environment management (UEM) with over 3,500 enterprise customers worldwide that have deployed to over 7.5 million desktops. AppSense DesktopNow and DataNow enable IT teams to deliver the ultimate user experience and productivity across physical and virtual desktops while optimizing security and reducing operational and infrastructure costs. The company is headquartered in Sunnyvale, CA with offices around the world.