Do Your Essential Business Applications Work Away From Your Office?

The modern workplace is constantly evolving—we're now reaching a point where, for many companies, the idea of a physical office housing their entire workforce is beginning to seem like an anachronism.

Working remotely is becoming an increasingly popular and viable alternative for many workers, but this transition requires a significant amount of adaptation in how organizations do business. In this article, we will look at how remote working puts added pressure on business applications—and how to ensure your remote workers remain as productive as your office-based employees.

The End Goal for Mobile Business Applications

For all companies making the transition to remote working, the aim is simple: all of the primary applications that they use in their central location should be available to all employees, no matter where they are working.

Each industry has its specialized tools or applications. Many perform such a specific function, for such a relatively small market, that there is little or no support for them. Unlike many more popular apps, they don't have an Internet portal by which workers can access their data— or, if they do, then it works poorly, with a decrease in functionality.

For example, many manufacturers utilize enterprise resource planning (ERP) applications that come with different modules that different sections of the workforce need to access. Law firms often have a document management system that acts as a central hub for the entire organization. These tools are so specific to the industry or organization that uses them that there is often no external support available to add remote functionality.

As the workplace changes form, and workers are more dispersed geographically and temporally, these tools or applications must be adapted to reflect this paradigm shift. Whatever is accessible in the office needs to have an equally effective virtual equivalent for distant working; and the performance and the speed that employees access the virtual equivalents should be identical, whether they're working remotely or sitting at their office computer.

Added Complexity

Unfortunately, this functionality across applications is still far from standard.

While we have grown used to being able to use our laptops and tablets with little difference in functionality whether we're at an office, in a coffee shop, or sitting on a sofa at home, business applications are often less efficient out on the road.

The truth is, a lot of applications—such as document management systems—aren't designed for remote working. They still work best when they operate from a centralized office or a central data center environment where everyone is able to access the application smoothly and efficiently. As yet, these kinds of business tools aren't available as a download from an app store, nor are they something that can be put together on an ad hoc basis.

There are simply too many moving parts to be able to make this kind of business application work easily outside of the central office. But all is not lost.

Virtualization: A Solution to Remote Application Issues

One excellent solution to the issues of using business applications remotely involves **desktop** or **application virtualization**.

In this set-up, the end-user sees no difference in performance or functionality. The icons are still on their desktop, the start menu, the layout are exactly as they appear on their work machine. Where the differences lie is in how the technology is run. All of the applications remote workers would need are run from a central location, but appear as though they're running locally. This is application virtualization. For desktop virtualization, the appearance and functionality of the entire desktop is reproduced virtually.

With virtualization, the speed of access can be extremely fast and, based on its set-up, virtualization can make working outside the office just as efficient as working at an office desk. The major benefit is that everybody in the company is able to access the same applications, no matter where they are, at any time.

Challenges of Achieving Virtualization Using In-House Resources

Application or desktop virtualization is extremely useful for companies who have reps out on the road or who use workers away from a centralized office. However, virtualization is not necessarily a straightforward option.

Most companies simply don't have the range of necessary skill sets in-house to design, install, and maintain a virtualized system. Creating and running a successful virtualized system requires a mix of skills, expertise, and experience that is rare, if not virtually non-existent, in most small-to-medium-sized companies.

The skills required to maintain IT functionality for most small-to-medium businesses usually stops at the level of help-desk support, or perhaps a little higher. There is simply no need, on a day-to-day basis, for a small business to employ a high-level IT architect. This means that when they are faced with something more complex, as virtualization clearly is, many modern offices have no way to implement an efficient, cost-effective strategy.

The Solution

A common solution to a lack of in-house expertise is to outsource the work to an outside consulting company, and this would certainly work, at least in the short term. It is an expensive option, with most of the payment due upfront, and comes also with the caveat that all of the experience and understanding of the process remains with the consulting company; your own IT team will gain very little benefit or additional experience of virtualization from this process.

The consulting company will tend to install and set-up the virtualization system they prefer, with little or no interaction with a company's own IT professionals.

An alternative to this approach is for a company to team up with an experienced and reliable external partner. If you feel like your organization would benefit from such an arrangement, look for a provider who not only provides expertise in creating and setting up a virtualization system, but one that remains in place to help provide training, support, and servicing. By paying a fee each month rather than a large initial payment, you'll also spread the cost out to a much more manageable level.

Using your specialist business applications outside of a work setting offers a great deal of flexibility to an organization and its workforce. Partnering with the right company makes this option not only possible, but an actual real-world benefit to your company and how it operates.