

Executive Viewpoint: Shifts in Client Virtualization

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In the same way that virtualization swept through our data centers over the last few years, making us rethink pretty much everything we do, a revolution is now underway in client computing. Some of the goals are different, but the changes are just as profound. With that in mind, here are three predictions which may be a bit radical and contentious, but nonetheless make perfect sense considering the degree of transformation we are going through.

1. Application virtualization has been with us for about five years, first brought to market by Softricity. Despite having been on the market for all this time, application virtualization has remained a difficult technology; one that can be implemented by top-end architects and administrators but is just way too hard for the majority. The principle problem has been in the packaging of applications, which has proven to take far longer than anticipated with some applications proving impossible to package. **Next year we will see application virtualization become far simpler to implement and, with multiple vendors actively working in this area, this may turn market leadership on its head. The following year, 2010, it will be hard to imagine being without application virtualization.**
2. Client virtualization using hypervisors for laptops and desktops is far behind its server counterpart. In 2008 we saw Neocleus launch product and Xen and VMware start talking about client hypervisors. This is all very early stage and, right now, the focus is on providing a virtualized but transparent view onto the hardware underneath. Due to the diversity of client hardware, this will not work for desktops and laptops, where the device driver requirements are so varied and management so difficult. **Next year will see the realization that client hypervisors will have to be provided by hardware vendors, with the drivers needed for that hardware already in place.** We might even see a vendor ship product that properly manages drivers and becomes the basis for bringing the management advantages of the virtual desktop to laptops and desktops.
3. To date, the debate about desktop virtualization has been about technology choices; which is the best, which will win and, more recently, when to use one over another. We are now moving towards a consideration of 'why' rather than 'which.' **Next year will come the widespread recognition that the 'why' for desktop virtualization is about being able to manage corporate desktops as a collection of standardized software components that are dynamically assembled as needed.** As long as we can deliver an operating system, the user's applications and the user's personality to a machine, which application delivery technology is used is immaterial - just pick the most appropriate for the circumstances. The key is to give users a familiar PC experience while IT gets to just manage a limited number of standard components, which can be done better and cheaper than the current model. Expect the goal of VDI to shift to standardization and the metric of interest to become the number of components needing management and how to drive that number down.

Will I be right? Only time will tell, but with the degree of change in client computing right now, we can expect significant changes as we appreciate what virtualization can do for us.