

Six Steps to Achieving True Mobility

By Michael Carper

DURING A RECENT meeting, I witnessed a depressingly familiar event. Someone was asked to share a computer file and said, "I can't open it without logging into my laptop and connecting to my network." Another added that IT had just given him a new laptop, but it hadn't "reinstalled all of my applications yet." There were dozens of computers nearby—all connected to a network—but none that offered immediate value.

This problem has existed since the invention of the personal computer, and the evolution to mobile devices hasn't resolved it. The problem stems from an approach to computing that assigns PCs to people, making devices like possessions instead of universally useful tools. But true mobility means the ubiquity of usefulness, regardless of location or device. Wherever we are, we should be able to access "My Documents," "My Applications" and "My E-mail."

You may be thinking, "We've solved this issue at my company. We use <insert tool name here>." But can your business executives access whatever they want from a plane, despite their lack of connectivity? And if a laptop is stolen, can you hand over a replacement with all files and programs automatically installed?

Connectivity may not be available for any number of reasons when access to information and/or applications is necessary. To solve this, IT must use automated methods that dynamically and consistently deliver a result tailored to users' unique needs and business roles. Here's how to enable true mobility with technologies that exist today:

1. Imaging. Image a single workstation operating system as closely to an out-of-the-box installation as possible. No applications should be included unless all users need them.

2. Standardization. You need technologists who know how to package software and deliver it to a single workstation image. The rule should be that no software gets installed on these systems without going through this delivery process.

3. Integration. You need a software distribution tool capable of integrating with a directory. The directory services infrastructure must accurately reflect job roles within the company. The software will be dynamically and automatically delivered to users based on their roles and needs. The tool must ensure that workstation configuration and delivery of the software are persistent.

4. SANs. Implement a storage and backup platform expandable enough to store all user data. Redirect the "My Documents" folder (or its equivalent) on fixed workstations to a storage area network (SAN), create areas for departmental file sharing and assign users' rights based on role.

5. E-mail. Keep all user data on the SAN, and deliver e-mail profiles dynamically. Personal folders must be eliminated, with all laptop users configured for offline folders. I recommend using an archival platform to move e-mail off servers, based on your company's data retention policy. Even archived e-mail should be available to users when they're connected to the network.

6. Remote access. Trim down to two remote access methods that provide a virtual private network connection for corporate laptops and a Secure Sockets Layer (i.e., a terminal server) connection for computers that the company doesn't own. Put a single sign-on platform in place with a password reset self-service capability.

These suggestions involve mass customization tailored to users' needs. It turns their computers into appliances, easily replaced or re-imaged. It eliminates the need to have IT staffers constantly troubleshooting. And it delivers everything your users need—documents, applications and e-mail—in a fashion that makes true mobility a reality. ■

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