

Case Study

Plumchoice

"In addition to the Citrix expertise that Covisia offers, their systems engineers are responsive and knowledgeable. They proactively follow-up with us, and they accommodated our compressed scheduling requirements. They also demonstrated flexibility throughout the deployment – their turnaround time was excellent."

Tom Arcand, IT Executive Director, PlumChoice

THE CHALLENGE

Founded in 2001, PlumChoice Online Technology Services is a privately-held corporation providing online computer and personal-device support to home users and small business. A large Internet Service Provider (ISP) recently approached PlumChoice about expanding the partnership and the number of customers for which PlumChoice would provide services on behalf of the ISP. "We needed to demonstrate a high level of security when providing remote support to the ISP's customers," said Tom Arcand, IT Executive Director for PlumChoice. "We use software that assumes control of customer desktops while they observe our troubleshooting. The ISP wanted assurance customer information would remain safe."

Up until this time, a virtual-private-network (VPN) connection provided adequate security. But the ISP required extra security, so PlumChoice needed a solution with more control over what technicians could do while connected to customer PCs.

THE SOLUTION

Having managed the deployment of a similar solution involving virtual application provisioning for a previous company, Arcand realized Citrix XenApp would provide the level of security that PlumChoice required. XenApp allows applications to be managed in the datacenter and delivered on-demand. XenApp also enables IT to centrally manage single instances of each application rather than loading software on desktops and laptops.

For PlumChoice, XenApp would also allow it to lockdown remote desktops used by technicians and control their technical support activities. "Our technicians have a secure tunnel over the VPN into each end-user PC, but XenApp allows us to dictate which applications each technician can gain access to without allowing them to access anything else," Arcand said. "This is particularly important when technicians use partner applications. XenApp allows us limit technicians to only what we want them to access."

Arcand also realized it made sense for PlumChoice to partner with the same solution provider he relied on for the previous Citrix deployment – Covisia Solutions. "My relationship with Covisia gave me confidence they would meet our needs," Arcand said. "We needed to launch the solution within a short period of time to meet our partner's requirements, and I knew Covisia had the expertise as well as the resources."

Covisia deployed the solution within 90 days by managing the proof-of-concept, pilot, production and deployment phases simultaneously. "We asked Covisia to complete the project in an extremely short time frame, and they delivered, but they also deployed a high-quality solution by ensuring enough resources were assigned," Arcand said.

Key Benefits of Covisia Solutions Deployment of Citrix Virtualization Solutions:

- Ensures security when technicians remotely assume control over customer PCs.
- Allows IT to centrally manage remote users and deploy applications rather than physically visiting desktops.
- Reduces number of physical servers required – from 25 down to 7.
- Supports multiple versions of Java on a single server with multiple virtual instances.
- Allows new users to be added quickly without purchasing new servers.

THE BENEFITS

Approximately 240 field and call-center engineers began delivering remote support services via the secure XenApp solution during the initial program, but eventually all of PlumChoice's 400 engineers will rely on Citrix. "Now that we have seen the success of this initial deployment, we plan to expand the solution across all partner services," Arcand said.

The added level of security that PlumChoice offers appeals to both partners and customers. "When a technician takes over end-user desktops remotely, there needs to be a high level of trust that desktops won't be compromised," Arcand said. "The XenApp solution deployed by Covisia allows us to demonstrate we offer complete security."

PlumChoice has continued to run support connections over the same VPN but now has more control over applications since they are managed centrally. Whenever any changes are needed, PlumChoice applies updates at internal servers rather than physically touching each desktop.

Citrix technology also brings the cost of each desktop down by approximately 30% in terms of hardware as well as software licensing. "With Citrix technology, we reduce the cost of hardware since remote desktops do not need as much computing power," Arcand said. "We can also purchase group software licensing that allows for sufficient simultaneous users."

The Citrix XenApp solution also reduces ongoing support costs. "When applications are upgraded without Citrix, we need to touch each desktop," Arcand said. "But with Citrix, we just upgrade the server, which reduces support costs by 30-40 percent, and we can perform upgrades across all technician desktops much faster."

Because PlumChoice deployed the Citrix solution onto Citrix XenServer, it significantly reduced the number of physical servers PlumChoice needed to purchase – from 25 down to 7. The virtualization infrastructure also comes in handy since PlumChoice runs multiple versions of Java.

"We previously had problems installing different Java versions on the same server," Arcand said.

"But with XenServer, we quickly isolate non-mainstream Java applications and put them on their own XenApp instance. When we add users, we don't have to buy a new server – we just add memory to an existing server and create a virtual instance."

In comparing Covisia to the other technology partners, Arcand said, "In addition to Covisia's Citrix expertise, their systems engineers are responsive and knowledgeable. They proactively follow-up and accommodate compressed scheduling requirements. They also demonstrate flexibility throughout deployments with excellent turnaround time."

IN SUMMARY

When PlumChoice Online Technology Services needed to increase the security of its online computer and personal-device support services, the company turned to Covisia Solutions and Citrix technology. Covisia deployed a Citrix XenApp solution on a XenServer virtualization platform that allows PlumChoice to manage and monitor activities of remote and call-center technicians when they provide technical support by remotely assuming control of customer desktops. The Citrix solution also allows PlumChoice to easily update applications and add users from a centrally-managed application, and the virtualization platform deployed by Covisia allowed PlumChoice to gain a 30-40 percent ROI during the first year of the investment.

About Covisia Solutions

Covisia Solutions is a full-service IT solutions provider focused on helping organizations align their IT operations with their businesses to improve information access and security; reduce complexity and cost; and manage technology to meet the needs of competitiveness, growth and change. Whether your need is improved information access or greater security, a network upgrade or strategic planning, Covisia Solutions can help your IT organization deliver for business.

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