Desktop Virtualization is Here—Are You Ready?

How often do you see IT competitors like Citrix, VMware and Microsoft on the same stage talking about their long-term visions for desktop virtualization? But that’s exactly what took place in New York City on Feb. 24, when Dell sponsored an executive-level event featuring three key technology partners, Gartner analyst Mark Margevicius and Terry Vaughn from Dell Services. The event was hosted and moderated by CIO Magazine’s Publisher Emeritus, Gary Beach.

Why the rare gathering of vendors? Because desktop virtualization is one of the hottest trends in IT—and the technology is grabbing the attention of many CIOs. Here are some of the highlights of the event—and topics this newsletter will examine:

- **Disruptive Technology**: Desktop virtualization may be viewed as a disruptive technology, but it’s here to stay. The potential benefits are too compelling for organizations to ignore. Even though a move to desktop virtualization will shake things up as far as how applications are delivered to end users—and maybe even create a few turf wars within IT—it’s a strategy that many enterprises are likely to adopt.

- **Beyond ROI**: There’s more than just ROI to consider when implementing this technology. Desktop virtualization can transform the way workers get things done, and the productivity enhancements go way beyond measurable returns. If you really want to evaluate the payback of this technology, you need to consider the total economic impact.

- **Start Now**: It’s time to stop kicking the tires and put this technology into a use case in your environment. Your competitors are probably looking at desktop virtualization now, if they haven’t already implemented it. Don’t get left behind.

Everyone’s talking about this technology or thinking about it, but the time has come to take the plunge. Read on for valuable insights that can help you benefit from the coming transformation.
When you're evaluating the returns on desktop virtualization, you won't see the same gains as you've seen with virtualization in the data center. That's why you should be looking at the broad economic impact of the technology to determine the real value to your organization.

Focus on the broad level of benefits the technology will deliver to the organization. For example:

- **Increased end-user productivity.** Desktop virtualization enables a more mobile workforce, so employees can access data and complete tasks regardless of where they're located. Adding to the productivity boost: the login process is less time consuming, applications run faster and devices need less maintenance.

- **Enhanced security and compliance.** It's common knowledge how important information security is today. A survey of attendees at the desktop virtualization event in New York showed that data security was among the top priorities of those evaluating virtual desktop technologies and partners. With a managed virtual client and centralized data storage you can more effectively control data flow and access to applications, prevent data theft, improve protection against viruses, meet regulatory compliance requirements and better enable business continuity.

- **Simplified manageability.** With the centralized operations enabled by a virtual desktop environment, you can provide preemptive support to end users and take advantage of device standardization. It's a much easier environment to manage. Virtualization technology also enables the rapid scaling you need to meet business growth.

The benefits of desktop virtualization are real, and translate rapidly into economic impact. It's clear that the ROI metrics of the data center just don't cut it when it comes to measuring the value of this technology on the desktop. But enhanced productivity and security, combined with an environment that's easier to manage are real, tangible benefits that will propel organizations to competitive advantage.

### Time to Stop Kicking the Tires

Desktop virtualization technology is here, and it's time to get started on an implementation. That was the general consensus among the speakers at the desktop virtualization conference in New York, some of whom cited examples of organizations that have already implemented virtualized desktops and are seeing significant benefits.

Industry experts say there are several factors driving the move to the new environment. These include:

- The need to reduce costs
- Operating system migrations (which can be combined with a move toward virtual desktops)
- Security and compliance issues
- Expected desktop hardware refreshes

Every company has an environment where they can take advantage of the capabilities of desktop virtualization. Delaying an implementation could prove to be a strategic blunder, because desktop virtualization is a game-changing technology that will transform the way people work.

Among the first things companies need to do when launching an initiative is identify a strong project team headed by a change-agent leader, and pick a trusted advisor to help with the implementation (more on this in the next article).

Then, rather than looking at early implementations as a proof of concept, you need to look at them as trials and put them into production in small test groups, according to Terry Vaughn, Director of Global Market Development at Dell, another speaker at the conference. “Pick a use case or two as your trial,” Vaughn says.

Some users—for example, CAD designers or medical departments that run high-definition video applications—will always need PCs. But there are plenty of potential use cases for virtualized desktops in every industry. At a typical company, the majority of employees are task and
knowledge workers who don't need PCs.

Here are a few examples of possible use cases in different industries: healthcare (doctors, nurses and clinical technicians); government (secure environments and training facilities); education (students, computer labs and library systems); manufacturing (factory/production lines and warehouses); retail (point of sale); and financial services (call centers and knowledge workers).

Once you've selected the use cases, deploy desktop virtualization in a production environment with “real users,” Vaughn says. Look for specific value propositions based on the types of workers in the use case.

For example, with financial services knowledge workers, focus on the increased security, application access and performance and mobility that virtualization adds. With nurses or doctors at a hospital or clinic, consider factors such as easy access to medical applications, reduced downtime and improved application performance. For application development teams, look at benefits such as standardized images and the ability to access development projects from multiple locations.

Allow user acceptance to drive future deployment. Once employees in the use cases see what desktop virtualization delivers, they'll spread the word to others in the organization and you'll be on your way to a broader implementation of hosted virtual desktops.

Wanted: Virtualization Desktop Specialists

Desktop virtualization is a disruptive technology, with the potential to affect the way millions of people get their work done. The possible benefits of the technology are clear: improved efficiencies, cost savings, reduced energy consumption, support for a distributed workforce.

But you should also expect some implementation challenges, not the least of which is smoothing over the turf battles that are likely to emerge. Because desktop virtualization affects the data center and client devices, it spans multiple areas of IT: desktops, servers, storage, security, and networks.

To ensure that a move to desktop virtualization goes well, determine who should be in charge of the effort and give that person the authority and resources needed to manage such a large-scale endeavor. To support these efforts, you'll need to create a strong cross-organizational team headed by a change-agent leader, says Terry Vaughn, Director of Global Market Development at Dell.

Speaking at the desktop virtualization conference, Vaughn recommended that this team include representatives from these areas of IT:

- Desktop - someone with experience in multiple operating systems, image and anti-virus software
- Networking - experience with LANs, WANs and load balancers
- Applications - both enterprise and desktop
- Server - a hypervisor specialist
- Storage - file sharing expertise

The team should also include virtual desktop architects and engineers. You also need to choose a “trusted advisor” that can create a defined path for your decision making for all things related to this disruptive technology. This advisor can help your organization:

- Deal with the inevitable culture change that will come with a move to desktop virtualization, including meeting business objectives without jeopardizing end-user expectations.
- Ensure that virtualization is appropriate for customer needs.
- Identify which desktops are most conducive for virtualization.
- Identify the appropriate virtualization technology for each work group.

Dell has the expertise to be your partner in a move to desktop virtualization. The Dell approach takes into
consideration the people, process and technology requirements for an effective solution. Having a knowledgeable partner is especially critical today, when the ability to get something done quickly is as important as having the right solution components.

A trusted advisor like Dell can perform a thorough analysis of workloads and application dependencies, which reduces the migration time, clarifies the business case and identifies technology requirements. You need to have extensive multi-discipline planning for effective execution, and a risk mitigation plan for optimal operational effectiveness. Dell can help your organization implement these best practices:

- Make sure virtualization is right for your business.
- Start with the understanding that virtualization isn't a "project," but a new way of doing things.
- Find the right people, and make sure they have thorough, product-specific training.
- Put policies in place to prevent virtual machine sprawl.
- Consider licensing issues.
- Use management and monitoring tools from the start.

With a cross-functional team in place and a trusted advisor on hand to help plot and execute a strategy, you're set to harness the transformative power of desktop virtualization.