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Horizon Private Cloud offers Hosted Virtual Desktops

Windows™ Desktops in the Cloud

In 2005, Orange County, California native Kurt Johnson won the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year award for technology. He was proclaimed one of the year's "*Who's Who of America's Businesses*" when the US economy was flourishing. At the time, technology companies were considered the future of our country – they were thriving, their limits were sky high and their growth seemed never ending.

However, the post 2008 economy, many American technology businesses fell to the weight of the recession. While other leaders of similar businesses struggled to maintain market position, Johnson felt that changing how Horizon did business would be the key to future growth – even in difficult economic times.

"We faced serious workflow, data, and process issues across the enterprise," says Johnson. "We had 6 offices, three in Asia, that all needed to access the same ERP, CRM, document management, and custom programs, not to mention our standard Microsoft Office applications. In our industry, speed is a competitive factor and communications between all employees is critical."

"In 2009, we took a serious leap of faith and embraced (then) new technology called virtual desktops," recalls Johnson. "We had already virtualized the servers; however we had not thought to virtualize the desktops. We saw that centralizing all our desktops in one data center could offer a huge competitive advantage by increasing employee effectiveness, reducing time, increasing mobility, and cutting IT expenses."

Three years ago, Horizon Technology removed the PC desktop and built their own private cloud. In doing so, all Horizon employees from each of the six international offices could connect to their desktop from any end-point device. Unlike other remote desktop applications, Horizon Technology's implementation of virtual desktops completely eliminated the actual PC hardware altogether.

Horizon Technology engaged a number of partners and implemented the first version of VDI across the enterprise. Not everything went as planned.

"Day one was not that great," recalled Mike Feffer, CFO of Horizon. "There was confusion about where our personal data from the desktops resided, how to access the virtual desktops, and how the virtual desktops would work on our warehouse and manufacturing floors. We struggled with issues of printing, scanners, and user education for a number of months."

Kurt and Horizon persisted and over several months were successful at 100% desktop virtualization across the whole enterprise. "With our new platform, I can access my hosted desktop from almost any device," says Johnson. "When the Apple iPad came out, I instantly saw the benefits of a hosted virtual desktop and was able to connect to my desktop anywhere I could get an internet connection. Because the desktops are hosted in our data center, we did not have the data security issues that others face with Goto My PC or LogMeIn."

"Virtual desktops literally changed our way of business," said Johnson. "Every employee's desktop and their data are stored in the cloud. This technology practically eliminated desktop downtime, loss of critical data and dramatically improved security. These are important productivity gains."

However, Johnson claims the real impact came from mobility as every employee has a consistent desktop experience whether from the office, home or on the road while enforcing data security and desktop management with fewer IT resources.

Launch of Horizon Private Cloud

"I accredited so much of Horizon's success to the virtual desktop strategy," says Johnson. "The technology we implemented, and perfected in 2009, changed how we do business. It was so successful that we decided to add our name to offer it as a monthly subscription to the SMB market."

Horizon Private Cloud is today the latest addition to the Horizon Technology "franchise".

"We believe Horizon Technology is in a very unique position to offer hosted virtual desktops on a monthly subscription basis," says Robert Christiansen, General Manager and CTO of Horizon Private Cloud. "We have three years of real-world VDI experience. We have seen every issue that an organization could face and delivered solutions and support necessary to address real-world problems."

"I want to share our success with other SMBs who may be concerned with switching to totally virtualized desktops," says Johnson.

HPC is one of only a few US companies to offer hosted virtual desktop service to SMB companies on a monthly subscription basis. Never before has small to medium sized business had enterprise class virtual desktop services available on a predictable monthly subscription.

"The PC refresh cycle is killing IT budgets," says Robert Christiansen. "Organizations are recycling PCs every 3-4 years. We offer thin client solutions delivered from our private cloud for a fraction of the standard PC model. The economics of hosted virtual desktops are significant and easily justified when you look at the total cost picture. However the true impact is business agility."

Christiansen states that what used to take days in his IT department now takes minutes. "We have improved the quality of services and increased employee satisfaction by delivering a better experience."

HPC's desktop subscription product is called vDesktop™. Starting at \$39 a month, vDesktop offers hosted desktops on-demand with options including Microsoft Office 2010, an Exchange mailbox, company file shares, and a host of off the shelf applications commonly found on most PC's. They also handle virtualization of common line business servers like Microsoft Dynamics, Peachtree, Sage and many other server based systems.

Going to Market

Both Johnson and Christiansen understand the reluctance to moving IT infrastructure to the cloud.

"We get it. Not everyone wants to move their data and systems to a cloud provider without some assurances," says Christiansen. "When we started in 2009, we had many problems that we did not foresee including performance and hardware costs. However, unlike many managed service providers, Horizon Technology had to make VDI work internally before we considered implementing VDI for another company."

"We worked through many issues that you only find when using the technology in a real world environment," says Johnson. "We are a \$100 million company with seven offices, spread across the US and Asia. We have three warehouses, a manufacturing operation, remote users, office workers and staff worldwide - all using virtual desktops from our collocation center in Irvine, Calif. For a business of our size, this is almost unheard of."

Going to market with Horizon Private Cloud is a real challenge. "I saw the dramatic impact of virtual desktops on the operation and knew that this was the future of cloud computing," says Christiansen. "The benefits are so enumerable that it is hard to present them in a way that does not overwhelm the prospective customer. What would you say to a desktop management solution that is higher quality, lower cost, more predictable, ridiculously mobile, scalable, and greener? You would shake your head and say 'Right'."

But that is the challenge, getting customers to understand, and believe, the benefits of virtual desktops.

It is hard to deny the evidence. Horizon Technology had hyper growth in a highly competitive market during difficult economic times. Horizon Private Cloud's vDesktop™ service and server virtualization for the SMB market may be perfect timing for today's business world.

"We point to our success," says Johnson. "It is hard to deny that virtual desktops have not had a dramatic affect on our business and our growth. We believe these benefits are available to others should they adopt this technology."

Best of Both Worlds

"In 2011, there has been a lot of attention on VDI," says Johnson. "We believe the service will skip the IT department altogether and go straight to the cloud. With a dedicated VPN connection to our customer's data centers, they can continue to manage their own line of business servers while Horizon Private Cloud will provide an outsourced desktop solution."

Christiansen believes this is the best of both worlds. “No CIO will cut over 100% of their desktops on day one,” says Christiansen. “We offer an easy way for our customers to switch their PC refresh cycle to Horizon Private Cloud. Instead of purchasing a new \$1,000 PC, we ship a \$200 thin client preconfigured desktop – provisioned from our private cloud. This process is very easy to test drive and reduces the impact on the enterprise as they migrate to hosted desktops.”

A Bright Future

Horizon Private Cloud is the next step in business solution for Kurt Johnson and Horizon Technology. Leveraging his company’s hard-earned experience and success, he has launched one of the first hosted virtual desktop providers in the country.

“We see a very real opportunity for our team,” says Johnson. “We have the talent, experience, and products at the right time. I am excited to see what 2012 holds for us.”