Delivering Self-Service Applications

Foundational digital workspace journey milestones

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Executive Summary

Letting users select the applications they need is one of the elements of an employee-defined work environment and a key milestone in the digital workspace journey. For a long time, consumers have selected, installed and managed the applications on their personal mobile devices, and many now expect a similar experience with business applications. By implementing self-service catalogs, employees can access the applications they deem appropriate to do their job within the limits of automated policy controls set by the organization instead of having a common set of applications installed on their device. And business unit managers can free up IT by defining application entitlements for their staff and manage requests for new applications.

A self-service application strategy empowers business managers to more effectively fulfill work style requirements and rapid changes in workflows, increasing efficiency and employee time to productivity. It is also an important component of bring-your-own-device (BYOD) programs because a self-service catalog provides a secure way to provision enterprise resources to both corporate and personal devices. With increasing telework, self-service applications facilitate remote onboarding and make it easy to provision and manage applications to employees anywhere.

Longer term, a self-service application model provides the highest return when it is part of a broader set of initiatives, such as transforming Windows application delivery and moving to identity-based access for corporate resources. Combining these strategies enables conditional secure access to a unified store of all types of applications, including software-as-a-service (SaaS), legacy, and mobile apps, on every type of device from anywhere.

Recommendations

A self-service approach to delivering applications is a central component of a modern employee experience, plus an important step toward streamlining workspace management and reducing support costs. To successfully transition to a self-service application model:

• Give business unit (BU) managers the responsibility for determining employee entitlements and access to corporate resources. Empower BU managers to become proficient in managing user entitlements and evaluating the related benefits and risks.

• Take advantage of the shift to self-service applications to review your desktop application portfolio and take a fresh look at the business criticality of the applications in use.

• Boost the effectiveness of remote work initiatives and BYOD programs by fostering a self-service culture around application delivery and management. Educate users on their gains in terms of choice, ease of enablement, and time to productivity.

• Eliminate labor-intensive and costly end-user computing (EUC) processes for PC provisioning and application delivery by offering self-service applications in combination with zero-touch onboarding processes.

• Disconnect applications from system images by moving to self-service applications, and use this shift as a catalyst for moving to a lighter-weight PC management model and transforming the delivery of legacy applications.

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Advantages of a Self-Service Application Delivery Model

Embracing self-service application delivery means moving away from IT broadly interpreting users' application requirements and delivering everyone a common set of applications to adopting a model where employees can discover applications relevant to their work and access them on any device and from any location. This shift entails transforming the underlying processes used to manage the lifecycle of applications.

Most organizations rely on PC lifecycle management (PCLM) tools to image PCs and to fulfill the application requirements of employees, which means that employee requests for new applications must be approved by IT. Typically, a new request triggers a number of administrative tasks, such as authorization, approval and license procurement, and requires IT to test the new application as part of a given configuration. New applications are often grouped into batched updates that are distributed on a defined schedule, potentially increasing the time to complete the request. These processes and time delays are incompatible with the agility expected by employees and competitive business demands.

With a self-service application approach, each business unit is responsible for determining its users' entitlements and approving application access requests. IT maintains a shared application catalog that contains native, SaaS, and virtual applications and desktops. IT also creates automated policies to grant and remove application access to user groups. Users can select and access the approved applications they need when they need them within the bounds of the predefined policies.

Moving to a self-service application delivery model brings several advantages to employees, IT and the business.

BYOD
Programs

Workspace
Management
and Support

**Self-Service
Application
Contribution**

Remote
Work
Initiatives

Employees'
Experience and Time
to Productivity

BUs Efficiency
and Agility

Self-Service
Culture

• **Strengthens BYOD** – With traditional software distribution mechanisms, managing applications on non-corporate-owned devices and ensuring employee productivity are challenging. A self-service catalog of applications moves a basic BYOD program to one that promotes employee productivity by guaranteeing access to applications at any time, whether using a personal device is because of employee choice or temporarily necessary due to a lack of a functional corporate device.

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- **Boosts remote work initiatives** – As 2020 has shown, remote work strategies are a key component of business continuity plans and have the potential to enhance productivity and efficiency—but only when employees have access to the corporate resources they need. In any remote work scenario, organizations might need to onboard new teleworkers and ship devices to new and existing staff directly from suppliers. In these situations, a self-service application catalog is critical for enabling fast and full user productivity.

- **Promotes a self-service culture** – Employees are increasingly tech savvy, and it is now possible to rely on them to manage some aspects of their workspace, such as choose relevant work applications, deploy updates, and resolve basic issues—all things that most employees are accustomed to do in their private lives with their personal devices. In fact, a good portion of the user population prefers to have an active role in their workspace management rather than asking and waiting for IT support.

- **Increases the efficiency and agility of business units** – BU managers would manage applications and access entitlements for their staff and have visibility of the cost implications of their choices. BU managers are in the best position to evaluate the risks and benefits of these decisions because they are more familiar with the tasks that their employees perform and better understand their needs and work style. In some cases, the shift to self-service applications can be part of a broader trend to embed more IT capabilities into BUs to achieve higher levels of customization of services and faster response to opportunities provided by new technologies.

- **Enhances the employee experience and time to productivity** – With a self-service application model, IT does not need to make assumptions regarding which tools employees want and need to be productive. Employees can select and use the tools they prefer. Self-service encourages employees to explore the range of options available and try tools that could help develop new capabilities and increase efficiency. When an employee selects an application, it is available immediately, reducing time to productivity. Empowering users to explore new productivity tools that can deliver a competitive advantage is a key objective of many digital workspace initiatives.

- **Streamlines workspace management and support** – By moving responsibility for setting employee entitlements to business units, IT's administrative work around new application requests is eliminated or greatly reduced. By complementing self-service applications with a shift to PC enrollment using unified endpoint management, the work and operational costs required to prepare a device are further reduced. New computers and mobile devices can be shipped directly to employees from the manufacturer and ready for use on arrival.

Value of Self-Service Applications Grows as Your Digital Workspace Journey Progresses

Longer term, a shift to self-service applications enables progress toward other digital workspace milestones.

Toward a unified endpoint management model

IT organizations are adopting modern, lighter-weight computer management techniques to simplify and reduce the work required to manage user devices. This new management model enables organizations to better keep up with the rapid evolution of modern operating systems. Moving to a unified endpoint management model for all devices, where the fast and efficient processes used to manage mobile devices are extended to personal computers, is one of the main goals of many organizations' workspace strategy.

This transition usually leads to a drastic reduction in the number of applications installed locally on devices, enabling device deployment to catch up with the shift toward SaaS and cloud-based applications that has been taking place across business application portfolios for some years. While modernizing device management, most organizations reassess their desktop application portfolio and take a fresh look at their business criticality. This review informs and shapes the self-service policies.

VMware customers who have gone through this process have typically concluded that no more than 20 percent of the desktop applications that had been installed locally needed to be deployed in that way. Instead, application virtualization and cloud-based applications offered an efficient alternative to local installation.

A single unified application catalog

The desire to move to a self-service model is not new. Many organizations already use the application catalogs included in PCLM tools or self-service support tools to make applications available to users through a "pull" model. But as application requirements have become more sophisticated and now typically include SaaS, virtual and mobile applications, the usefulness of the older catalogs has been reduced because they typically can handle only apps that are natively installed. The result is using multiple catalogs and stores.

The value of self-service delivery is significantly enhanced when organizations adopt identity-based access and implement a federated, single sign-on (SSO) solution that can broker access from all devices to all applications, including mobile apps. Delivering all applications through a single catalog reduces the number of touchpoints and improves the employee experience. The combination of a self-service application catalog and an SSO solution, which also brokers mobile apps, delivers a truly unified application catalog that can later be complemented with contextual and adaptive access capabilities.

Managing the Transition to Self-Service Applications

Organizations that have accomplished a successful transition to self-service applications have not just focused on technology and implementation but also in engaging BU managers and staff in terms of education, training and suggestions.

Communicate with employees. Most employees are ready to take a more engaged role in managing their workspace, but the shift to self-service applications still requires a communication campaign about the upcoming launch and how it works. Communication is most effective when it centers on an employee's gains, such as the ability to exercise more choice and to personalize the workspace. Point to resources that inform users on how to access the application catalog, search for and discover new applications, get notifications about changes or actions they need to take, and request applications that are not currently part of their standard entitlements.

An ongoing notification channel helps make sure that employees know about changes or actions required on their part and the availability of new apps. You could use the same channel to provide application recommendations based on a user's profile.

Train business unit managers. BU managers will be responsible for defining and managing employee entitlements to applications and access to corporate resources. Focus training on the new processes for managing credentials and establishing entitlements. BU managers might also need assistance in gaining full visibility of the productivity benefits and cost and risk implications of their entitlement decisions.

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Establish new EUC lifecycle processes. With self-service apps in place, organizations have the potential to transform device onboarding, which was traditionally done by deleting the manufacturer-supplied image and replacing it with the corporate image. Typically, these processes can account for 20 percent of the PCLM cost. IT staff can instead shift their focus to creating and managing comprehensive enterprise application catalogs that include all application types. Culturally, this shift needs to be managed carefully because it involves replacing some well-established processes with new ones and modifying the responsibilities of some IT personnel. EUC leaders need to be prepared to address potential resistance by explaining the value, not just in terms of IT efficiency but also about the opportunity to develop new personal skills.

Establish virtual working groups with adjacent IT and business functions. Many digital workspace initiatives require breaking down traditional IT silos to achieve a greater level of internal collaboration. In the case of self-service applications, EUC leaders need to collaborate with identity team representatives, application owners and BU managers to establish role-based, flexible policies that control access to company resources based on the user, device, network and location. With organizations increasingly promoting a remote work culture, EUC leaders should work with application development teams to support a view of business processes as modules, or workflows, that can be mobilized and delivered to users through their self-service catalog.

Foster an employee self-support culture. Establish new rules of engagement with employees and actively involve them in the management and support of their workspaces. A portion of the staff will find the transition to a self-service model natural, but others will need help. Generally, self-support is ideal for simple tasks in which employees can get what they need faster by doing it themselves compared to calling the help desk. But there is no point in wasting employee time on more complex and time-consuming tasks.

IT can make training resources available, such as short video tutorials, knowledge base repositories and FAQs, about the self-service approach and how to set up tools for peer support and exchange. Policy documents describing the use and support of enterprise devices and personal devices are also needed to clarify user responsibilities for managing devices versus those of IT.

Self-Service Apps: An Important Step in Your Digital Journey

Self-service applications bring immediate benefits by supporting remote work and BYOD initiatives while streamlining the overhead and costs of PC lifecycle management. In the longer term, self-service applications enable you to progress toward other digital workspace milestones, such as introducing contextual access to a unified application catalog and shifting to modern PC management. For a successful transition, it is important to focus not only on the technology. Success is tied to making employees, IT staff and business unit managers comfortable and competent with the new processes.

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