IPM

ENABLING UNIQUE USER WORKSTYLES

DESKTOP PERSONALIZATION & STANDARDIZATION CAN CO-EXIST

Work styles and technology preferences have become as unique as the people a firm employs. Everyone, from the administrative assistant up to the partner, wants the technology around them to match their work style, be accessible and be secure – anywhere, anytime. Due to this growing demand for personalization, many firms opt for customized service and support leading to complicated scripts and personal configurations instead of developing an overarching IT business strategy. The end result – decentralized IT management chaos and users that are never truly satisfied.

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In 2002, one of IPM's legal clients inadvertently began down the path of a highly personalized desktop when it began accommodating individual partner requests for software, settings, and data access. As one of New York's leading law firms, management was continuously looking for ways to retain and attract talent and saw "white glove" customer service and desktop personalization as an opportunity to improve employee satisfaction. With nearly 700 staff, associates and partners, the firm had a sizeable IT department whose main focus over time shifted from leveraging IT to advance the firm to catering to individual IT personalization requests. During a 10-year span, IT developed inordinate amounts of custom login scripts and document templates to accommodate individual preferences – a plan with good intentions, but with unproductive and frustrating results.

These custom scripts began wreaking havoc on the firm's aging infrastructure and testing the patience of associates and partners alike. From lengthy login times and slow system performance to wasted billable hours and inefficient use of IT, the firm's quest for white glove customer service and desktop personalization was now an out-of-control and unmanageable nightmare.

EXCEPTIONS ARE THE RULE

The workplace, as we know it, is changing; consumer technologies are creating a user-driven workplace that is not only shaping how employees work but also influencing corporate IT protocols and policies. Employees want the option to work wherever and whenever; they want device freedom of choice and they want an uncompromising computing experience. In early 2002, requests for highly personalized services began to increase and the firm began advocating white glove service as a means to keep partners content and attract new legal talent. Over time, staff, associates and partners alike embraced the firm's user-driven services and bombarded IT with requests to accommodate device and application preferences, make system tweaks to meet individual needs, and customize work experiences to their individual liking.

By 2011, this was now an overwhelming and out-of-control and unmanageable IT burden.

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IT spent a significant portion of each day manually installing software, writing custom scripts or macros and helping employees personalize their technology experience at work, with inconsistent results and system failures. As the years passed, IT struggled to keep pace with the demand for desktop personalization due to the limitations of the firm's aging infrastructure, the lack of standardized management procedures and the volume of manual labor required to keep customized projects operational.

Focused on the user's 'here and now' demands, the firm failed to see the shortcomings of its IT infrastructure and instead of creating a productive and personalized work environment, the firm created an unmanageable workplace bottle neck riddled with inefficiencies, frustrations, and poor system performance.

Partners were calling their assistants on their way into the office asking them to start their computer because login times were taking upwards of 10 minutes. Once logged in, system performance was painfully slow and various software versions and outdated hardware impeded productivity. Because the amount of personalization in the computing environment was so widespread, the IT department spent countless hours manually updating desktops because each one was so different.

After 10 years of tolerating and adapting, the firm retained IPM, Inc. to help put in place an infrastructure to properly support their IT and business aspirations for a personalized yet standardized workplace.

DESKTOP PERSONALIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION CAN CO-EXIST

Personalization in the workplace is more than instant technology gratification, it's a strategic IT business approach that can help improve organization flexibility, foster a more engaged and productive workforce and help companies stay ahead of the competition. This firm realized the value a personalized work environment could bring to its workforce, but underestimated the IT requirements of such a pursuit.

With IPM's expert guidance, the firm identified four strategic goals for this IT initiative: 1) Enhance the end user experience; 2) Create a modern, stable and flexible desktop platform; 3) Simplify management of the environment, and 4) Implement a more strategic approach to infrastructure decisions. Using these goals as project metrics, IPM consultants mapped a multi-phased technology plan anchored by six IT initiatives:

- Migrate from Windows XP and Office 2003 to a 64-bit Windows 7 and 32-bit Office 2010 environment to improve user experience and provide greater memory management and enhanced security.

- Deploy Citrix XenDesktop to create a virtual desktop solution that transforms Windows desktops and applications into an on-demand service available to any user, anywhere, on any device.

- Implement a new user profile management solution and leverage AppSense Environment Manager and Application Manager to properly support Windows 7 and XenDesktop profiles and personalization.

- Use Microsoft management tools, including SCCM, WSUS, WDS, App-V, and components of MDOP to centrally manage and deploy software applications, patches and updates securely.

- Upgrade and modify Active Directory's structure and schema to meet performance and management objectives.

- Package all applications so they could be delivered on demand, but through a standard process.

- Replace outdated desktops with new PCs to properly support new software enhancements.

During a seven-month period, IPM worked with the firm's IT department to design a standardized workplace with a personalization layer that could support user requests without compromising IT security and system management.

Once completed, IPM mapped implementation results to the firm's IT goals to demonstrate the initial benefits and value add of their IT investment. Less than five months from completion date, the firm has already experienced measurable benefits.

- Enhance the end user experience

  - Improved system performance and throughput speeds and reduced login times from 10 minutes to 30 seconds.

  - Access from anywhere on any device with consistent personal settings

  - Software request turnaround of under a week with "no touch" installation and high success rate

  - Replaced custom log-in scripts with standardized profiles and policies managed by AppSense Environment Manager that provided a consistent user experience across any device, anywhere.

- Create a modern, stable and flexible desktop platform

  - Replaced custom tools and scripts with vendor products to capitalize on third-party troubleshooting and support and free up IT to focus on more strategic initiatives.

  - Created an interconnected environment that more readily fostered internal and external collaboration.

- Simplify management of the environment

  - Replaced a highly distributed environment with a "managed desktop" concept that makes it easier for IT to centrally manage and identify predictable behavior.

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- Implemented a series of new tools to manage desktop deployment and appearance to achieve standardization and consistency.

- Created management procedures to more effectively respond to and mange individual requests.

- Implemented a more strategic approach to infrastructure decisions

- Developed system protocols to better manage "exceptions" and replaced manual procedures with automated commands.

- Designed a group policy to evaluate the feasibility of incoming requests.

SUMMARY

When a firm decides to support desktop personalization, it is a powerful statement that speaks volumes about a company's commitment to its people. However, the impact of these initiatives can be significantly trivialized when advance planning and preparation are not taken into account.

In hindsight, this firm had good intentions and business rationale when it decided to commit to desktop personalization; it simply committed without the underlying infrastructure and processes to execute it efficiently. Instead of empowering staff and innovating operations, the firm's reactive approach to desktop personalization had the reverse effect creating more challenges than opportunities. IT business strategies need to take into account all parties involved, from the end user to the IT department that manages the processes, to ensure the initiative is successful. As with any major IT initiative, understanding where you are and where you want to go are key steps to executing a sound plan and ensuring the firm's long-term IT business success.

ABOUT IPM

For more than 30 years, IPM has been the IT force behind some of New York Metro's most prestigious brands. Backed through partnerships with technology leaders including Microsoft, Citrix, EMC, VMware and more, IPM offers professional services, product sourcing, integrated service management and IT staffing with an unmatched engagement experience - from concept to execution. Learn more at www.ipm.com.