



“By consolidating our locations and adopting a Citrix virtualised environment with thin clients, we have cut costs, helping us towards our mission to beat cancer.”

Jane Swindle,
IS Service Manager,
Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK finds solution to Windows 7 upgrade challenges with XenDesktop

Cancer Research UK is the world's foremost charity dedicated to beating cancer through research. Its mission is to improve people's understanding of cancer and help to prevent, diagnose and treat the disease. Its work is funded completely by the public via fundraising events that include the Race for Life series, Shine and Emeralds & Ivy, as well as the charity's 600 high street shops, the online shop and corporate partnerships.

The challenge: cost-effectively upgrading to Windows 7

As a charity, Cancer Research UK strives to get the most from its funding resources by controlling administrative and operational costs. At the end of 2010, the charity undertook a consolidation of its eight London offices into a single location in the Angel Building, Islington to reduce overhead expenses. Outside of its London base, the charity also operates regional offices and five core research institutes.

The original plan was to relocate user desktops and laptops to the new site. However, the machines were running Microsoft® Windows XP® and the IT team saw an opportunity to upgrade to Windows® 7 as part of the move.

To avoid the costs of purchasing replacements to support the new operating platform, the IT team sought a different solution.

Jane Swindle, IS service manager, said, “We had several goals. Instead of a rigid one user/one desktop model, we wanted to let employees choose any available machine in the new office. With flexible working, we could save a significant amount of space, cut power and equipment costs and reduce environmental impact. Flexible working also would let us make organisational changes without moving furniture and equipment, and add staff without requiring additional space.”



The IS team further hoped to lengthen the hardware upgrade cycle, gain the ability to lock down devices and simplify IT support by using thin clients instead of full PCs, as well as make it easier for employees to work from home by accessing resources on their own computers instead of requiring a Cancer Research UK laptop.

Key benefits

- Expedites migration to Windows 7 platform
- Enables flexible working in the office and at home
- Cuts hardware, energy and administrative costs
- Frees up funding for core research

Applications Delivered

- Microsoft® Office and Project
- Adobe suite
- Donor systems
- Clinical trials application

Networking Environment

- iGEL thin-client devices

Finally, the IS team aimed to standardise the office environment on a single technology platform. Previously, both Macintosh and Windows devices were supported, adding complexity and causing interoperability issues.

Implementing a Citrix XenDesktop environment

Working with SCC, a Gold Citrix® Solutions Advisor, the IS team chose desktop virtualisation as the best solution to its multiple challenges. Based on the success with Citrix® XenApp™, used for virtual delivery of legacy applications and the availability of a cost-effective licence trade-up program from Citrix, Cancer Research UK chose to implement Citrix® XenDesktop®.

Users in the Angel Building location receive a standard, locked-down, hosted virtual desktop running on Windows 7, delivering key productivity applications including Microsoft Office and the Adobe suite. XenApp functionality within XenDesktop is used to deliver legacy applications (such as donor systems and a clinical trials application) and others that do not yet support the Windows 7 platform, as part of the virtual desktop.

Currently, over a thousand office workers access virtual desktops on iGEL thin devices. The older desktops have been repurposed for other locations waiting for Windows 7 to be implemented at that location. A few mobile/remote staff (shop managers, clinicians) have retained corporate laptops, and the software development team have kept their traditional desktops.

Cost savings support cancer research

Desktop virtualisation has helped Cancer Research UK achieve significant cost savings, allowing more funding to be directed to research.

“Our supporters want to feel confident that their donations are primarily going to scientific research, not operations and administration. By consolidating our locations and adopting a Citrix virtualised environment with thin clients, we can channel more funds to our mission,” Swindle said.

XenDesktop is helping Cancer Research UK cut costs in several ways. First, the delivery of a standard virtual desktop enabled the flexible working model to be used in the Angel Building, which cut space requirements by a fifth. In addition, the charity no longer has to provide laptops to staff who wish to work at home.

Over the long term, the IS team expects additional hardware savings because the lifespan of a thin device is about five years compared to three for a PC. The devices can simply be swapped out if there is an issue, instead of requiring extensive support by the IS team.

Another cost benefit is the reduced power requirement of thin devices vs. PCs. Energy conservation also contributes to the environmental aims for the new location, which include reducing electricity use by 7.5 percent and shrinking its carbon footprint.

XenDesktop expedites move to Windows 7

The XenDesktop implementation simplified and accelerated migration to the new Windows 7 platform, enabling the charity to rapidly provide these capabilities to users on any device, in any location. Otherwise, the IS team would have had to roll out Windows 7 to each desktop—a time-consuming process. Although not all applications are currently compatible with Windows 7, XenApp application virtualisation provides a seamless workaround.

Ultimately, a critical aspect of any IT project is user satisfaction. At Cancer Research UK, employees are not just accepting virtual desktop delivery on the iGEL clients—they are voluntarily handing in their laptops.

Swindle concluded, “We originally planned on 850 thin clients and 350 laptops, but because people are so enthusiastic, we now have 1,300 thin clients, including 60 in our Oxford office, where employees asked for them after seeing them at the Angel Building.”



Worldwide Headquarters

Citrix Systems, Inc.
851 West Cypress Creek Road
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309, USA
T +1 800 393 1888
T +1 954 267 3000

www.citrix.com

Americas

Citrix Silicon Valley
4988 Great America Parkway
Santa Clara, CA 95054, USA
T +1 408 790 8000

Europe

Citrix Systems International GmbH
Rheinweg 9
8200 Schaffhausen, Switzerland
T +41 52 635 7700

Asia Pacific

Citrix Systems Hong Kong Ltd.
Suite 6301-10, 63rd Floor
One Island East
18 Westlands Road
Island East, Hong Kong, China
T +852 2100 5000

Citrix Online Division

6500 Hollister Avenue
Goleta, CA 93117, USA
T +1 805 690 6400

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