Future-Proofing Managed Services for Citrix Environments and Improving User Experience

A major poultry products distributor in the U.S. market needed to improve upon their existing managed services solution for their Citrix environment. Their goal was to not only build resilience in their existing system, but also to prepare for expansion and upgrades in the future. The Client partnered with Insentra to deliver the project.

THE CHALLENGE

Spanning four separate Citrix Farms across the United States, reliability and consistency was needed to minimize system impact to their operations. A whole-of-environment, zero disruptive approach tailored to the Client's requirements was paramount to a successful transition.

ONBOARDING AND DISCOVERY

The deployment and integration of our toolset into the Client's environment was the first priority. Working closely with the Client, we configured our utilities within key areas of focus that were vital to the continued operation of their Citrix deployment.

By running our software in parallel with the outgoing vendor, we successfully performed the transition of support, while maintaining system integrity. In addition to the transition of responsibilities, meetings were held with their existing infrastructure support vendor to develop paths of communication and escalation, where needed.

The key to any successful relationship is communication. Throughout this process, we also worked closely with our partner, Thin Client Computing. As the system architects, they brought a wealth of knowledge and information which ensured a smooth transition. They were also able to provide awareness into the direction that the Client wanted to go in future deployments.

During the first week, Insentra's Solution Architect worked in collaboration with their in-house Citrix administrator, identifying concerns and listening to challenges with their outgoing vendor. In doing this, we were able to pinpoint what our Client prioritized in terms of their service expectations which allowed us to articulate our collective goals and work towards exceeding their expectations.

STABILIZATION & STANDARDIZATION

Once our tools were in place, we performed our initial Citrix Health Check. In doing this, we identified areas of their environment where best-practice standards could be applied. This also uncovered configurations that may not have been consistently applied, or perhaps not in a manner that would achieve the best performance. We quickly found several items could provide considerably higher level of reliability among their locations after only minor adjustments.

By reviewing their virtual hardware, additional changes were made to achieve the greatest performance of the software, as well as ensure each server in their farm provided a consistent user experience.

insentra

IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The need for effective Change Management standards was a key issue highlighted in early talks. Working with both the partner and our Client, we developed a review and approval process, along with integration of our Change Management documents into the process. With this, we were able to bring maturity into the change process and establishing responsibilities.

As their Citrix Managed Services Provider, we took ownership of their vDisk imaging process. Again, by applying standardization, we documented the process and then applied it at each of the locations. A QA (Quality Assurance) test workflow process was developed to further ensure that system changes were thoroughly vetted prior to promoting them to production. QA is often one of the most overlooked yet important aspects of systems administration.

THE FIRST UXAAS REPORT

As part of our ESS (Enhanced Support Services) Platinum service, we provide our clients with quarterly or bi-annual UXaaS (User Experience as a Service) reports. Using a combination of Lakeside's Systrack, PowerBI and locally available tools, we produced an in-depth report on the health and wellbeing of the Citrix environment. This included a deep dive into what areas were causing the highest levels of negative impact to the system and as a result, the end users.

The report is broken down into a number of specific categories such as CPU, Virtual Machine, Latency and Disk - each category offering a unique insight into the servers of the environment. In many cases, we were able to provide visibility on issues the Client wasn't aware existed. This included core application configuration issues, network configuration issues and virtual hardware bottlenecks.

THE OUTCOME: THE PROOF IN DATA-BACKED METRICS

Based on the UXaaS scores generated for various categories, we could identify two locations that were currently underpowered, requiring the build-out of additional VM's to accommodate the demand. We were also able to pinpoint how one location performs significantly better than another and more importantly, why.

At the end of the report, we could then provide a prioritized list of actionable items that, when addressed, would further improve the end users' experience in the Citrix environment. Working closely with our partner, Thin Client Computing, we then took these items into consideration and developed a plan of remediation. Using the newly developed Change Management process, we began putting these plans into action.

It's often said that 'perception is reality' and hearing reports of a decrease in problems at each location was certainly a positive thing. And with the data generated from our UXaaS reports, we are also able to prove this positive perception with data-backed metrics.
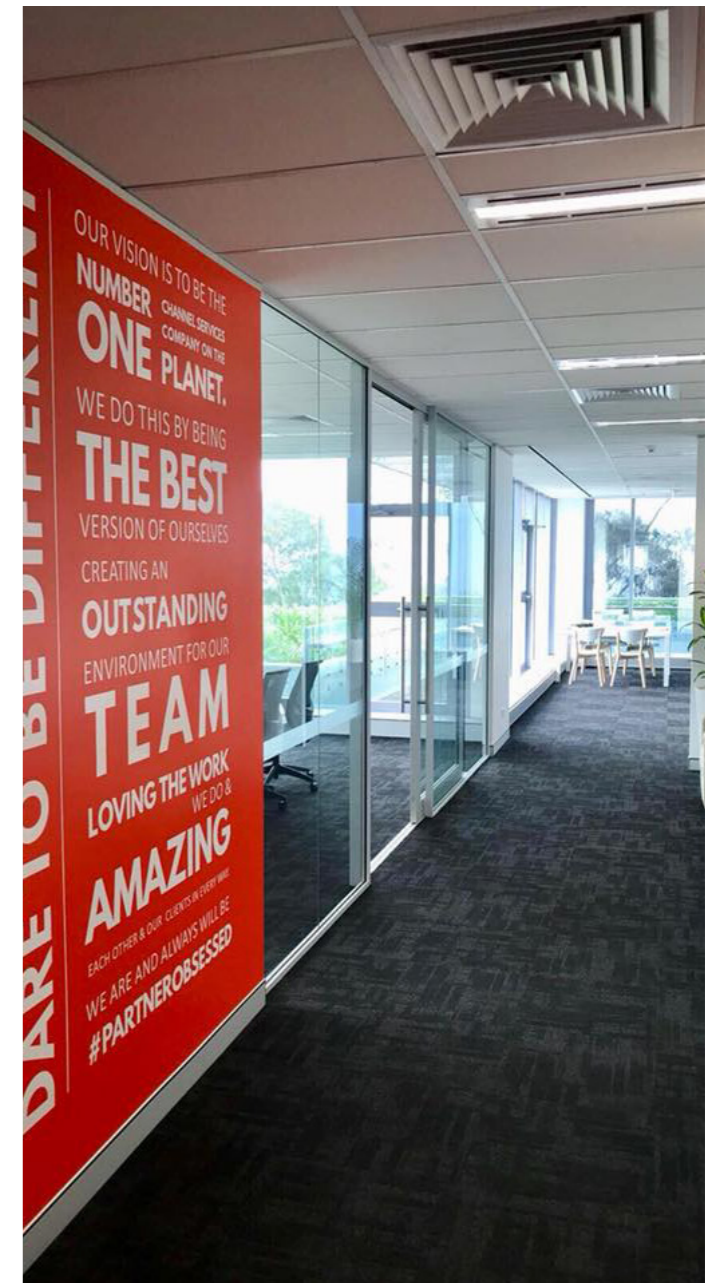
THE ROADMAP AHEAD

When larger changes are made to an environment, we have the ability to monitor the UXaaS scores, in order to determine the 'what' and 'how much' of an impact these changes have from an objective perspective. Monitoring covers anything from a file server's CPU performance, to logon speeds of a Citrix VDA. Each of these changes synergistically affect a user's experience when utilizing the environment.

When combining the changes made from both the Citrix Health Check, along with recommendations from the UXaaS report, we can view graphs over a prolonged period of time to ensure that we are heading in the right direction for an optimum, future-ready Citrix environment.

insentra

insentra