

Good preparing for a company-wide migration to windows 8 report example

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- SWOT Analysis on the viability of upgrading to Windows 8

Windows 8 was released on October 26th 2012 and Microsoft made it increasingly easy for upgrading from previous operating systems including Windows 7, Vista and XP. Having an OS upgrade is termed a major step in staying abreast with the current offerings and solutions. However, the upgrade process requires a plan of execution to mitigate the risks involved in migrating to a new OS. Crescent Manufacturing Inc. is a leader in crafted and customized home furnishings. The company has a corporate headquarters located in Texas and two other manufacturing branches located in Nebraska and Maryland.

The company has 250 employees in Texas, 175 employees in Maryland and 25 employees in Nebraska.

The suitability of upgrading to Windows 8 in Crescent Manufacturing is a factor of the benefits offered and the challenges. In this case, a SWOT analysis will be conducted to determine if Crescent Manufacturing would be at a better position if it decided to upgrade to Windows 8.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

Windows 8 is the latest offering from Microsoft. Upgrading to Windows 8 has been made easy and less costly for that matter. An upgrade option is available from the Microsoft Windows 8 site at a cost of \$39.99 for a downloadable installer or \$69.99 for a mailed disk. The stub installer is only 5MB and will run compatibility check on the computer to tell which programs will function and which will not.

Security features in Windows 8 are advanced and will give the organization a better grasp of the security aspect. Windows 8 devices that use the Pro and Enterprise editions can be integrated to the Active Directory domain and the group policies set in the Active Directory will be used. It enhances security and allows centralized management.

The enterprise version of Windows 8 has a feature known as Windows To Go tool. This tool allows users to work on multiple devices that can be booted from a flash disk. It provides flexibility in that they can work from their personal devices at home or on the move in a secure environment without keeping any part of the job-related details on the devices. This feature reduces the risk of data exposure to rogue computers – a challenge that has been faced by enterprises in BOYD.

Sandboxing is the strength of the new operating system. By default, all Modern applications run in sandboxed environment with apps having to declare their capability in accessing applications such as webcam and library.

Performance – Direct Access allow remote users to connect to the corporate network without using VPN connection. While it required a physical smartcard initially, a virtual smart card is supported by Windows 8 Enterprise. Given that Crescent Manufacturing has 50 sales employees who are constantly on the move and that they require to continuously connect to the company resources. It is a great offering that will enhance performance and efficiency of the team.

Windows 8 Branch Cache optimizes wide area network bandwidth to allow content sharing between main office computers and branch office

workstations. The functionality works by copying content from the main office and caching it at branch offices so that branch users can access content locally rather than over the LAN.

Another important feature in Windows 8 is the centralized backup management where users can access files from many folders through as network. The Folder Redirection facility allows users to access content saved on the local drive using another computer on the network. There is also centralized backup of documents.

Weaknesses

Despite the innumerable plus points, there are some concerns that have been raised concerning the operating system. First, Windows 8 works best with touch screens and most PCs in the organization are not touch screen rather, they are mouse-based.

User interface- The user interface in Windows 8 is a deviation from the early versions of Windows operating system. The metro user interface and dual screen support presents a steep learning curve for general users. In addition, Metro GUI is not suitable for the traditional application users on desktop machines; rather it is suitable for tablets and handheld devices. Only IT personnel are well-versed with Windows 8 operating system. Also, the rest of employees know the basic of Windows 7 and still reliant on help desk to solve most of their computer problems. This scenario implies that introducing Windows 8 without sufficient training will dramatically impact on operations and performance.

Opportunities

Virtualization- Windows Client Hyper V can use 8 as a test platform for both clients and server virtual machines. It is because it supports virtual processors and the capability to allow users to take snapshots and dynamic allocation of memory.

Threats

The threats of incompatibility are real and some of the legacy LOB systems might not be compatible with IE10 the browser for Windows 8. Adopting the application right away may introduce more incompatibility challenges than those experienced with windows 7

Finally, the organization had just upgraded to Windows 7 and experienced numerous incompatibility issues and resources constraints during the process. Another upgrade to Windows 8 means that a fresh round of testing of all Enterprise System is required. This requirement might not go well because of resource constraints and the fact that many of the Windows 8 apps are still in the building stage and their stability has not been confirmed.

- Detailed upgrade plan
- Systems by location or department to be replaced with new or compatible hardware

The requirements for Windows 8 upgrade include;

- Processor of 1GHz CPU or faster
- 1GB RAM for 32-bit version and 2GB RAM for 64-bit version
- Disk space of 16GB for 32-bit and 20GB for 64-bit

- Graphics: DirectX 9-capable video card and WDDM driver
- For Windows Store, a requirement of 1024x 768 pixel screen resolution is required. Also, snapp apps require a screen resolution of 1366x768 pixels.

All the workstations without these specifications need to be upgraded with the appropriate hardware before the upgrade process can commence.

Targeted departments include Finance, IT Support, Administration, Marketing, Production and Operations. Marketing departments has a team of 50 salespersons with laptops and tablets purchased five years ago and running on Windows 7 operating system. These devices require Windows 8 readiness check to ascertain hardware and driver compatibility. Windows Upgrade Assistant is used to check their suitability.

- Migration approach phase-in approach or flash-cut approach

Phase-in approach of migration is preferred over flash-cut approach. It is because the sequential upgrading of the systems accords the organization sufficient capacity to streamline operations and reduce service outages. With phase-in strategy, systems at the headquarters are upgraded and supported until they are stabilized before the other branches are handled. For the time being when headquarters systems are upgraded, branch locations act as operation center's and business critical operations are supported here. The advantage of this technique is that in case of an unexpected event, operations are not totally grounded in all the branches rather; only the affected branch will be dysfunctional. Upgrading of systems is a complex process that requires planning and coordination. For this reason, phase-in approach provides the organization an opportunity to conduct the process stepwise. It will also enable them to learn from the previous one and

correcting any imminent pitfalls.

- Migration time frame

Crescent Manufacturing has business functions in three locations, Texas, Maryland and Nebraska. Much computing resources are located in Texas, followed by Maryland and then Nebraska. The time line for migration in Texas is estimated to be three months owing to the number of resources. Upgrading in Maryland will take two months while that in Nebraska will take a month. Upgrading will take place in sequence one department after another until all the systems are stabilized.

System incompatibility is number one issue that is likely to impact the length of migration time. In this case, Windows 8 readiness check and upgrade assistant are two key components of determining the compatibility of hardware and software. A readiness check is conducted on all the machines before the upgrade process is conducted and a report derived. From the report, it is possible to establish the magnitude of incompatibility issues that may arise. Appropriate steps will then be taken to combat the issues.

- Approach for thoroughly testing of business critical applications

In today's global business environment, organizations are reliant on software applications to automate their most critical business processes. The effects of software effects are huge and companies need to guarantee that their embedded systems need to operate without disruption. One of the approaches of testing business critical operations is by employing high availability tests. High availability in the range of 5-nines is critical for mission critical applications and assures the user to some degree that the systems can withstand adversities. Because system testing is not sufficient

alone, unit and integration testing which invokes code generators that automatically create mock objects or stubs to construct a complete, executable test harness is favorable. This way, knowledge is extracted on how much the system can withstand any operational environment and an availability range is computed.

- Best practices for securing remote employees laptops and tablets

Security and compliance are advanced in Windows 8 and remote users have greater management of their security. There is centralized management through integrated Active Directory domains that define a common set of policies for a group of users. It improves security and performance.

Second, the Windows To Go tools is an advanced functionality that ensure that remote employees work on their personal devices at home or work but without retaining any part of the work-related data on the devices. The risks of data exposure on rogue devices is significantly reduced as IT costs are slashed and performance is enhanced. Though the functionality is locked to Enterprise version alone, it allows users seamless experience.

- Pros and cons of configuring AppLocker to standardize the software used by employees across organization

AppLocker is an important application that standardizes applications to be used in an organization. AppLocker is used to prevent unauthorized applications from running. AppLocker allows IT professionals to decide which applications are allowed to run on user desktops. It restricts users to software apps, installation programs and scripts they need. The pros of the app include:

Easy management of overall security strategy through standardization of applications

Centralized management of the group policy

It makes it possible to build strong rules for application updates and other management functions. For instance, the administrator can create a rule that allow all versions of an application greater than 3.0 to run if signed by the developer. With correctly structured rules, administrators can safely deploy updates to allow applications without the need to develop new rules for every version.

Some of the cons of AppLocker include:

AppLocker is disappointing in the end user experience. The end user message that is displayed when the application is blocked is not editable and so the administrator cannot convey a meaningful message to the end user base when the application is blocked. It is exacerbated by the lack of method a user can use to request access to blocked applications. Because it is unlikely that IT department will get it right the first time they configure application control policies. It will be together with the lack of informative messaging and user feedback procedure, refinement of policies will be a major challenge.

Second, Applocker can handle software installation packages but will do nothing when a user is granted local admin rights as the user will have total control of the desktop. In this case, the whitelisting of software packages will be limited.

- Process of managing application installations and updates via Windows Store

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The process of managing application installations and updates in Windows 8 via Windows Store is as follows. First, Windows 8 makes it easy to install the application from Windows Store. However for updating such apps, a tedious process is undertaken. The user has to monitor the live tile for the store app change to know the number of updates available. The user then launches the Store app and goes through steps to install the updates. This manual process is occasionally repeated as updates become available.

A change has been effected in Windows 8. 1 where the update process is automated without the user interaction. Once an application has been installed, Windows automatically search for update as soon as they are available and install it with no user interaction. This functionality can however, be turned on or off from the “ Turn off Automatic Download and Install of updates”.

For security reasons, organizations have disabled Windows Store to prevent their employees from installing additional apps. An improvement in Windows 8. 1 that allows apps to be installed automatically even when Windows Store is disabled is available.

In conclusion, Windows 8 radically differs from earlier operating systems and is packed with new features that present different experiences are depending on the user. An organizational-wide migration to Windows 8 is only viable if there is reason to believe that users will be comfortable with the use of the OS in addition to numerous features it offers. As it stands, Crescent Manufacturing has only IT personnel well-versed with the operation of the OS. Employees are well-versed with Windows 7 and given the huge

disparities between the two, a steep learning curve is expected which may impact on performance and operations of the company.

References

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