

ESG Brief

Top Ten Accelerants of Cloud-hosted Desktops in 2020

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Technology matters more than ever today, as ESG research recently discovered when 83% of respondents shared that they believe that technology has increased their personal productivity. In 2020, it will be important to watch how quickly businesses move from testing cloud-hosted desktops and identifying use cases to moving into production. If indicators start pointing to a rapid pace of transition through this process, expect to see the market growth follow exponentially.

Are Desktops Doomed?

When IT had to perform an endpoint hardware refresh every three to five years and work around an operating system upgrade schedule, work for the IT pro was relatively predictable. Employees were happy on day one but didn't experience the initial out-of-the-box performance again until they were due for an upgrade. Fast forward to today and new features seem to be introduced daily; network access abounds throughout our daily lives while endpoint device innovation challenges the traditional endpoint experience, IT management strategies, security strategies, and legacy processes.

Technology matters more than ever today, as ESG research recently discovered when 83% of respondents shared that they believe that technology has increased their personal productivity.¹ Desktops as we know them today may not be doomed, but how they are delivered, secured, and managed will impact the quality of the technology experience.

Top Ten Drivers Accelerating Cloud-hosted Desktops

Consuming desktops from the cloud creates opportunity for change, consistency of IT management, and the potential to deliver the high-quality day-one experience every day. As businesses explore the potential of hosted desktops, multiple factors can help drive the business case and justify IT investment. These include:

1. **Security:** The cloud offers benefits that can make a user's environment more secure by never storing data locally on the endpoint, executing applications in the safety of the cloud, and protecting user privacy. Businesses can boost security without impacting user experience. Additionally, the cloud providers use their threat intelligence

¹ Source: ESG Master Survey Results, [2019 Digital Work Trends Survey](#), November 2019.

and apply it to the hosted desktops in an effort to recognize security breaches sooner and proactively address potential exposure.

2. **IT management:** Managing desktops from a central location can significantly help IT perform routine tasks, expedite helpdesk requests, and rapidly respond to change. IT pros can reduce and potentially eliminate running agents on endpoints while still monitoring and managing desktops at scale. The predictability of the end-user environment stabilizes as IT delivers a consistent experience for its users.
3. **Availability:** Desktops in the cloud can be spun up (and down) in minutes, enabling IT to process requests efficiently without having to step through a cumbersome hardware procurement process. Cloud-hosted desktops are available across devices and can be accessed from a web browser. Prebuilt and IT-approved desktop images from a variety of operating system flavors and versions are easily made available to users.
4. **Disaster recovery:** When desktops are hosted in the cloud, they can be accessed from anywhere that has an internet connection. Businesses have the opportunity to keep employees connected and productive should an event occur that limits access to a physical location. Endpoint hardware failures can also be quickly addressed as a user can access a cloud-hosted desktop while the hardware is replaced or repaired.
5. **Legacy OS and applications:** All businesses have devices that are running outdated (and often unpatched) versions of an operating system and applications that are dated or linked to an unsupported operating system. This is not ideal and leaves the business exposed to potential security threats. Hosting these desktops in the cloud can lessen the burden and risk while IT explores ways to upgrade the operating system and the applications.
6. **Cloud strategy:** Businesses have cloud mandates that are driven by executive leadership. While most of these efforts have been application- or data center-led to date, hosted desktops present an ideal opportunity to build upon this strategy and partner with the cloud providers. Businesses should look at multiple angles here to see where it makes sense to move legacy applications to the cloud or explore cloud-native applications that were designed to operate in a cloud consumption model.
7. **Phasing out VDI:** VDI has been a fantastic solution for certain use cases but tends to plateau at a point where it does not reach mass employee adoption. VDI is also anchored to complex and costly infrastructure that limits how businesses may scale deployments. Hosted desktops offer the same value and benefits as VDI without the data center infrastructure payload and IT management responsibility.
8. **Trust nothing:** IT endpoint management strategies today have to establish device trust before user authorization. This seems like a simple task on the surface, but the massive proliferation of device types and versions makes it easier for IT to deny access as opposed to allowing access and inducing an elevated risk profile. Hosted desktops make it easier for IT to enable access since the image is centrally secured and managed. Once a user securely authenticates (likely with MFA), access is granted and risk can be averted.
9. **Temporary:** Businesses often have temporary employees who may be contractors or seasonal workers. Providing them access to business resources can be a heavy lift for IT to build, deploy, manage, maintain, and decommission the device, data, application, and user profile. Hosted desktops help expedite access for these workers while enabling IT to turn on and off access as required. The hosted desktops can be monitored and configured with limited access while providing access to the resources required by the employee.

10. **Simplified endpoint strategy:** With hosted desktops, companies can potentially unleash themselves from a cumbersome hardware refresh lifecycle and begin to embrace the heterogeneity of devices in the market today. Employees can work from their preferred devices with a consistent experience.

The Bigger Truth

Cloud-hosted desktops are an open opportunity for businesses to improve the end-user experience, simplify IT management, and boost confidence in security. While cloud-hosted desktops have been in the market for some time, ESG expects the market to be reignited as alternatives to legacy desktops make inroads into businesses, top tier cloud providers unleash new capabilities, and businesses turn to the cloud as a reliable and trustworthy platform to operate a business from.

Technology providers will need to demonstrate bare metal (or better) performance and the economics of a cloud-hosted desktop model to help businesses place long-term investments. In 2020, it will be important to watch how quickly businesses move from testing cloud-hosted desktops and identifying use cases to moving into production. If indicators start pointing to a rapid pace of transition through this process, expect to see market growth follow exponentially.

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