

Considerations Regarding Thin-Client Solutions For Cambridgeshire Schools

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Summary

Terminal Services/Thin client solutions certainly have their place, but thin client is usually implemented in environments where there are a limited and controlled number of applications in use, for example in a corporate (e.g. solicitor's, banking or business) environment where they have a particular database application in use.

The school environment is not, and should not be so controlled; you have to be prepared for new and innovative software. Thin client technologies can restrict you in the number and types of applications being run.

- The additional costs for a higher specification server(s) is generally higher than any cost savings made at the client "end".
- There is a substantial cost for the Citrix software and the licensing model does not support education/academic cost models
- The hardware requirements of using older equipment mean that there is a greater chance of failure and thus non-access by that particular station. Such systems do not usually have a maintenance or warranty agreement which means that a failure is usually a loss of the system forever owing to it being beyond economical repair
- The thin client is great for productivity software but always struggles to cope with Multimedia or education simulations which are extensively used especially in secondary where Thin Client is usually considered.
- The premium between new thin clients and fat clients is not sufficient to justify the additional Citrix cost
- It is a single strategy proposition, fat clients can be used in a thin manner but not vice versa

Why is this?

Each application in a thin client environment has to be tested; there is no guarantee that all applications will run; even some of the more common applications such as Microsoft Office have to have a script run to enable them under some thin client technologies (i.e. Citrix)

Installing applications:

Although you only need to install an application once in a thin client environment, the installation is often not as simple as in a normal desktop environment; often "tweaks" have to be made to applications to ensure they run smoothly and reliably.

Everything relies on your server!

This is important. Although ICT Service (for example) servers have as much failover built in as possible for the money, you are still not 100% reliant on that server being up for your Internet, email, curriculum applications etc because applications and general network access all run from the local PC

In a thin client environment, if your server fails, you can do no work whatever - no Internet access, no email access, no access to any applications.

Support

Adding thin client technology to your network adds another layer of complexity. It is unlikely schools have the technical know-how to manage a thin client environment; to be perfectly honest, many schools find it difficult to manage a "normal" school environment.

There are increasingly proprietary based thin client solutions which means that there is an increased risk of a lower acquisition cost but a high after sales cost following tie in.

Other solutions:

Thin client solutions have their place, but the monies in a school are generally better spent in the following way:

- Rolling PC and server replacement strategy
- Making best use of available technology to simplify rollout and rebuild of PCs
- Make use of software such as EASYSuite to ease the administrative burden, for example by allowing installation of software to multiple PCs from a central location
- Ongoing, standards based technical support