

“New Web 2.0 Workstation: virtualization and enterprise mashups”, by Eric Samson, Product Marketing, Convertigo.

Every ten years or so, a new generation of workstations sees the light of day. Invariably smaller, more powerful and more connected. We have moved on from the old monochrome terminals we used to be connected up to in the office to smaller, far more powerful models that keep us permanently linked up with co-workers, partners and customers.

With each new generation, the balance between user productivity (ergonomics, intuitiveness) and ease of deployment and maintenance gets another shake-up. The previous generation, that of e-mail and web-enabled laptops, put the accent on a return to ease of deployment, at the price of lower productivity. Today, the expectations of Web 2.0 users and the rapid emergence of mobile terminals in the workplace are once again forcing us to reassess that trade-off.

Virtualization, both of applications and of the workstation itself, is now a strong trend for the new generation of workstations. The ease of deployment it provides is a must-have benefit for IT departments, who also appreciate its implications for the support of all new terminals.

However, the virtualization of screen protocols should not be the only focus for improving the new workstation. Users today have too many applications to handle in dealing with their day-to-day tasks. They are always having to juggle between windows to find the information they need. Not only is that information split up between different applications: each application itself contains too much irrelevant data. Applications are designed in identical fashion for different user populations, and with no integration mechanism. All of which generates errors, lost revenue and user stress.

Rich Internet Applications (RIAs) offer users new-found ease of use, and support the integration of new communication tools (social networks, video chat, etc). Composite RIAs, or mashups, are clusters of visual widgets that can interact with each other. People are already familiar with consumer widgets such as GoogleMap, but in the enterprise context they need to be combined with existing applications (CRM, SFA, ERP, SCM), whether they are deployed on an extranet, on an intranet or on a mainframe.

Enterprise mashups can deliver widgets connected to the company’s mission-critical applications and form them into customized composite RIAs. The enterprise widgets aggregate, filter and convert the data, and the users can then have instant access to all the relevant information they need, on a Web 2.0 oriented workstation.

The critical IS applications are accessed via secure dedicated enterprise mashup servers. In a way, enterprise mashups can be seen as extending the notion of virtualization to the data in the information system, while taking due account of system requirements such as security, privileges, and IS governance rules in general.

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