

Removing PCs From The Point Of Sale

New zero-client computing frees up space, reduces overhead, and simplifies system architecture.

by Jim Emery

Maintaining the technology for each point of sale in any retail environment can oftentimes be daunting. Consider the numerous peripheral devices like cash drawers, credit card readers, and printers, as well as the PC needed to connect and run each of these devices. The costs and time associated with deploying and maintaining all of these devices can be extremely expensive.

In a traditional POS architecture, proprietary retail systems and displays are commonplace; however, maintaining these systems can be costly and complicated over time as the components become unavailable, technology changes, and the space requirements limit flexibility for relocation. A traditional POS system includes a personal computer, cash drawer, credit card reader, printer, bar code scanner, and other POS devices, depending on the retail environment. These devices are all connected to a network via the PC, which is oftentimes bulky, difficult to relocate, unreliable due to problems with the hard drive or fan, and expensive to maintain.

A new zero-client computing architecture eliminates the need for personal computers at every point of sale. This architecture connects, monitors, and controls remote display, USB, and serial devices over IP networks without a locally attached host PC or thin client. A dedicated host PC is no longer required at the POS station, and there are no changes to application software. Zero-clients contain network protocols, allowing each POS device to be supported over a wired or wireless IP network. These devices are connected over the network to applications running on a PC or server elsewhere on the IP network. This can reduce the number of PCs a retailer must invest in and pay to maintain. It also puts the PC out of harm's way in a back office or central location where it is less likely to be damaged.

Improve Your Merchandising, Digital Signage

Zero-clients can be used in a variety of traditional retail



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or POS applications. Eliminating dedicated PCs from checkout lanes frees up more space for merchandising. Placing zero-clients in retail kiosks also provides the flexibility to market unique products or services without requiring a standard PC as part of the kiosk. This makes it easier to set up temporary kiosks for the holidays, for example, or to easily relocate POS stations to accommodate a retailer's merchandising strategies. By doing so, it ultimately can contribute to creating a more customer-centric retail environment, in addition to reducing the total cost of ownership of a PC or POS station.

In addition to checkouts and kiosks, zero-clients are also ideal for digital signage. Retailers are realizing the value of digital advertising and adding this technology to their stores. Similar to POS stations and kiosks, a zero-client can reduce the total cost of ownership for digital signage by eliminating the need for a dedicated PC or expensive media player at each sign.

Zero-clients are a new technology that could change the paradigm of the point of sale and digital signage. Retailers will no longer have to plan their POS stations or digital signage around the constraints of using a PC at each location. Because zero-clients are smaller and more durable than PCs, they create more space and reduce the total cost of ownership of an organization's POS technology. Retailers can then dedicate that space to merchandising strategies, which can ultimately enhance the customer experience and contribute to an organization's bottom line. □