

# Virtually possible

How virtualization can help small businesses

**T**here has been a lot of talk about virtualization these days but we've only begun to scratch the surface on what virtualization technology will bring to small business computing.

"At first, the only advantage appeared to be that one could use software to emulate having multiple servers on one physical server," says Rory Sanchez, CEO and president of SLPowers in West Palm Beach, Fla. "This saves money on the cost of hardware ownership and space requirements, but as we begin to dig deeper into the technology, we uncover what could lead to an entire paradigm shift in how small business computing gets done."

*Smart Business* asked Sanchez about the effect virtualization will have on small businesses in the future.

## Why do you think there's going to be a paradigm shift in how small business does its computing in the near future?

Traditionally, companies owned their infrastructure: servers, PCs, switches, routers, etc. When these things needed servicing, an engineer came out and worked on them. Eventually, remote control technologies allowed engineers to service your systems without ever physically traveling to your site or setting foot through your doors. Then remote monitoring systems allowed them to predicatively manage your systems for you and minimize downtime with proactive maintenance. But systems still grow old and they still need to be replaced, and when it's time to spend money, your company still looks at making capital expenditures.

Virtualization and the managed services of the near future will relieve you of all these challenges. Once an operating system is detached from talking to its underlying hardware, as happens in a virtualization stack, we can run any number of servers or desktops, running any number of operating systems, across a number of CPUs, and attaching to an array of virtual storage devices, giving us complete freedom to start and stop server processes, mirror them and truly pro-



**Rory Sanchez**  
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vide customers with on-demand computing.

In simple terms, small business users could have a small device on their desks to connect their monitors, keyboard, mouse and USB peripherals. This device will connect to your virtual desktop(s), which will in turn connect to your virtual servers or at your virtual data center. When you need a new server to run your business, instead of it taking a few weeks while it is ordered, built to your specs, shipped and provisioned, it could be up, running and ready within hours. Best of all, this on-demand computing technology will be available to you as a service; you pay only for what you use and without capital expenditures so it's all an operational expense.

## What benefits will come from this shift?

The move from owning your infrastructure to a subscription model brings many advantages. First, companies will no longer speculate on ongoing support costs; when servers and other infrastructure are provided to you as a service and managed for you, those costs become

stable and predictable. Next, you eliminate going back to the well. Normally, all capital expenditures need to be approved by a board of directors. Companies like to refresh a third of their systems each year so that nothing is more than three years old, and then they have to budget for support. Now, all those things move over to an operational expense. Companies do not need to own their infrastructure; it is provided as a service, and they pay for it monthly.

## What problems or drawbacks will come with it?

The technology to accomplish these things is here today. By the end of 2008, it will be readily available and companies will begin embracing virtual desktops, virtual storage arrays and infrastructure as a service, much the way that virtual servers have been accepted. The challenge in adopting this new way of doing small business computing will be in getting small businesses to accept a virtualized infrastructure and trust their service provider and bandwidth provider to deliver to them a robust and reliable solution and to support them properly in the long term.

## What are the solutions to the problems?

There are countless advantages to the virtualized data centers of the near future, not only from simplicity and speed of deployment, but also from its ability to provide business continuity. The solution, however, in overcoming the adoption 'fear factor' of small business will come from partnering with a trusted service provider who uses proven technology and a robust infrastructure but can deliver these services at a price point that is attractive to small business, and we expect those providers to emerge in the coming months. <<

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