AppSense and Citrix Personal vDisk 5.5
(formerly known as RingCube)

Better Together
Summary

In August 2011 Citrix announced the acquisition of RingCube, an exciting move by Citrix that offers the ability to solve some of the cost issues in VDI associated with supporting *pooled* images in the datacenter for each user in order to enable personalized environments.

However this has created some confusion in the market in regards to where AppSense has traditionally fit versus what RingCube or Citrix Personal vDisk as it is now known, offers.

As AppSense CTO (and former Citrix CTO) Harry Labana blogged\(^1\) at the time of the acquisition, RingCube's technology will make the most sense for Departmentally Installed Applications (often called “long tail applications”), though not necessarily for settings or user data management. There is definitely an opportunity to address the challenge of delivering applications that may not be required by every user, which would cause a requirement to have different Windows images per department and adding cost to the VDI model. AppSense views this as a good move for Citrix, for the above-mentioned challenges.

Ken Bell, the Product Architect for XenDesktop, discusses how Personal vDisk technology can help manage long tail applications in his blog post\(^2\). In it he advocates the value of Personal vDisk to solve the issues with long tail applications, which are the applications that IT does not want to put in the company wide image but wants to support on a dynamic composed and as needed basis, and deliver with tools such as Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager. It appears on a company level we are in agreement.

Can Personal vDisk solve broader personalization challenges?

While Citrix Personal vDisk together with User Profile Manager (UPM) can help overcome most of the challenges with user settings, specific applications, and user data, this approach might not be desirable for certain situations:

1. It does not completely solve the onboarding and migration challenges from Windows XP to Windows 7. How do you get a user migrated from a physical desktop and *all* their applications running on Windows XP to XenDesktop running Windows 7 with Personal vDisk?
2. Many customers will support a mix of physical and virtual. As much as we would like, we cannot assume that customers will exclusively use VDI for their desktop needs, which the majority of deployments don't. What's the solution for multi-platform going to be?
3. Architecturally, it doesn't make sense to store data in this way. It's terribly inefficient which Ken agreed in his blog post. Citrix recommends redirecting the data out to other places where it can be managed more effectively.
4. Personal vDisk isn't about settings management. It's about the long tail of applications.

The good news is AppSense works in conjunction with Personal vDisk technology to help solve these gaps in the enterprise architecture.

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There is a better way forward.

AppSense works side by side with Citrix. The market-leading user virtualization solution is now integrated on the world’s most widely deployed desktop virtualization platform. Both AppSense and Personal vDisk represent the very best technology our respective companies have put forward in enterprise workspace virtualization solution.

This provides the capability to populate all the user settings directly in to (and out of) the Personal vDisk store for the user, as users make changes on other Windows PCs and in XenDesktop. This has the benefit of ensuring full user adoption through independent management of the user environment.

For those of you that want to understand how this technically works, here’s what happens.

Typically (without Personal vDisk) as the user logs on onto XenDesktop with a pooled VDI architecture in use, Windows profile will be created. After it’s created, AppSense personalizes the user in real-time as they use applications with AppSense Environment Manager; capture their settings as they make them and store them into the database. The user logs off and the image is discarded. When the user logs on again, AppSense re-personalizes the image instantly.

With Personal vDisk this process becomes more efficient. As the user logs on, the Windows profile is created. That now gets stored in Personal vDisk rather than recreated each time like with a regular XenDesktop logon. AppSense personalizes just as before meaning the user gets a consistent experience irrespective of which physical PC, XenApp session, or VDI desktop they logon to.

What’s your value to the overall XenDesktop stack?

AppSense helps IT to plan, integrate, and deploy virtualized desktop solutions quickly, with less risk, and with higher user adoption rate – making it easier to transform desktop computing environments.

The ability to personalize user information into Personal vDisk is just one part of the overall solution that adds value to Citrix.
AppSense provides significant value to Citrix in helping with:

1. **User Onboarding and Personalization**
   As discussed above, AppSense can help in the migration process to get users from Windows XP into Windows 7 (or any future OS platforms) running on XenDesktop and/or XenApp. Organizations can partner with AppSense in this area to help implement POCs and pilots successfully. The user’s first impression will be that nothing changed – their desktop and application settings look the same. Ongoing AppSense can ensure that as users move from a physical to a virtual desktop and back again, that the user experience remains a consistent and productive one.

2. **Environment Optimization and Security Management**
   Many VDI pilots fail simply because the user experience was suboptimal, with slow logon times and inconsistent look and feel. AppSense has the capability to streamline the logon process. It also adds a security layer to allow granular management of user rights that can help with application compatibility especially on Windows 7 UAC as default. AppSense also increases security with a layer called Trusted Ownership that blocks any malware from being executed that the user downloads onto their desktop, allowing the minimization of antivirus functions in the XenDesktop VMs. This helps to provide a secure and usable user experience delivering quick logon performance that allows the user to do what they need to do but at the same time delivering the security that enterprise demands. In fact, many AppSense customers buy the Management Suite simply because of this capability.

3. **Density and Response Improvement**
   AppSense also makes a big difference to XenDesktop and XenApp TCO per user models. Typically antivirus/antimalware and Adobe Flash products create a significant density impact, with a loss of up to 30% density and a corresponding increase in the cost per user. AppSense can significantly minimize and constrain these and other performance hogging tools and technologies, while increasing security and significantly improving the TCO. The net effect is also providing the user with a virtual desktop experience that is both high performing and responsive.

**Conclusion**

AppSense adds significant value to both XenDesktop and XenApp deployments, inclusive of Personal vDisk technology. Onboarding the user is now much cheaper and easier, with a consistent user experience that eliminates the need for costly manual migration tools.

Planning, integration, and deployment of virtualized desktop solutions become quicker, with less risk, and with higher user acceptance – making it easier to transform desktop computing environments. When combined with Citrix, AppSense user virtualization provides:

- Personalization of complex environments such as multi-OS platform and delivery mechanism environments
- A consistent look and feel across all Citrix FlexCast models and physical desktops
- Rapid logon and responsive desktop environment configured based on user or device context

AppSense positively impacts how users first experience VDI and session virtualization and provides a responsive, streamlined and secure logon experience to work anywhere.

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