

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO REMOTE CLIENTS

REMOTE CLIENTS HARK BACK TO THE DAYS OF MAINFRAME COMPUTERS BUT OFFER 21ST CENTURY COMPANIES CHEAPER COMPUTING, MORE FLEXIBILITY AND GREATER RESILIENCE.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

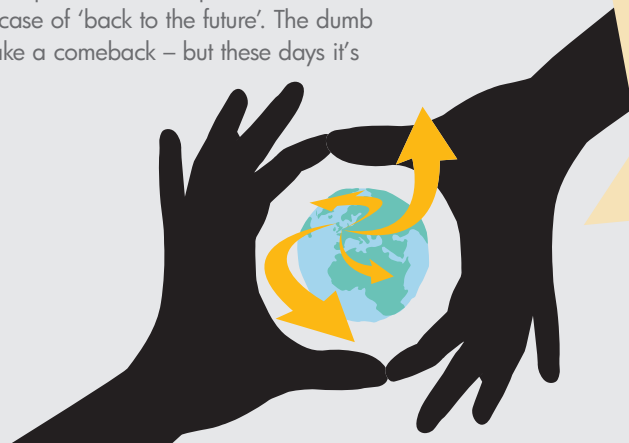
25 years ago computers weren't personal. They were huge mainframes that lived in their own shiny rooms, tended by acolytes in white coats. Mere users had only terminals on their desks. They had a screen and a keyboard but no smarts or memory. All they did was connect the user to the mainframe.

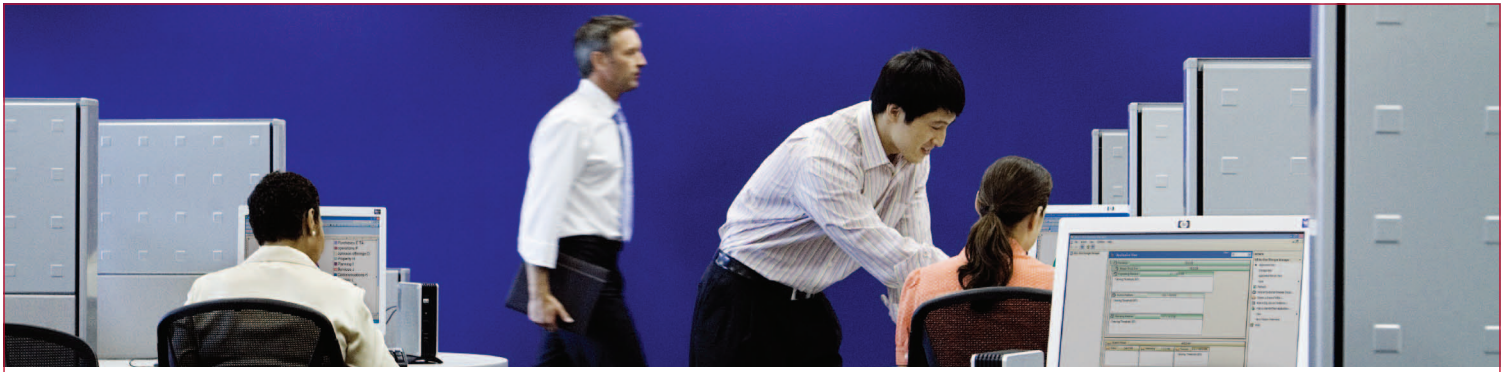
This approach to computing had advantages. Nobody left a mainframe with 100,000 customer records on a bus. Dishonest employees couldn't plug their MP3 player into the mainframe and download sensitive customer information. Viruses were unknown. The highly-trained acolytes at the computer centre didn't install their own screensavers, download porn or fall foul of viruses. (Although they did occasionally play text-only games with names like Hammurabi and Hunt the Wumpus.) When a dumb terminal went wrong, they just got another one out of the cupboard. Yes, life was simpler in those days.

Then, in 1982, came the personal computer. In a blur of progress, suddenly we had the laptop, the mobile phone, the pocket PC, the internet and the smart phone at our disposal. What's next? Actually, it could be a case of 'back to the future'. The dumb terminal is about to make a comeback – but these days it's called a Remote client.



Research by Gartner and others suggests that over five years the total cost of owning a PC can run to as much as £12,000. IDC, a market research firm, reckons that remote clients can slash this in half once all the costs of support, maintenance and power consumption are taken into account. No wonder, says Forrester Research, that desktop virtualisation is the future of the corporate PC.





THIN IS BEAUTIFUL

To a user, a remote client looks just like a normal computer, albeit smaller, cheaper, quieter and more reliable. It has a keyboard, a mouse and a screen. It runs Microsoft Windows and the usual Microsoft Office applications. Like the terminals of the old mainframe era, there are no moving parts. No hard disk. No processor.

The big difference is in the data centre. This is where all the computing happens. Data centres don't need to be in the same building – or even the same country – as the thin clients. A bank, for instance, could have one or two data centres for all its branches.

Instead of a single all-powerful mainframe, thin clients talk to clusters of blade PCs or virtualisation servers. A blade PC squeezes a complete computer onto a single circuit board just one inch wide and five inches tall. Up to 240 fit into a single cabinet. Each user gets access to their own blade PC while they are logged on. Virtualisation servers are powerful computers that can create a Windows environment for several dozen users at a time. IT departments can use the different options to balance performance against flexibility.

REDUCING THE LIFETIME COST OF PCS

To an IT manager, Remote clients look like the answer to their prayers. IT departments can install new software and carry out maintenance without having to visit each PC on each desk. Thin clients have no moving parts to fail and users can replace or move them without specialist training or hands-on support. In addition, everyone's files are stored centrally so they can be backed up properly. Companies with Remote clients are also better prepared for disasters. If the unthinkable happened, staff can move to a different location and still access their personal files and applications.

Geeks aren't the only ones who should be excited about Remote clients; they should please the boardroom too. Remote clients consume much less power and require less air conditioning than conventional PCs, which is good both for the bottom line and the environment. Productivity increases because computers are more reliable and employees can work from home or different offices much more easily.

Lastly, with remote clients, companies are more resistant to virus attacks, data theft and accidental data loss. Unnoticed when everything goes well, data security hits the headlines (and a company's share price) when it breaks down.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for switching to remote clients is financial. An IDC report (Blade PC Computing: A New Paradigm) calculates that companies could save \$1,372 per user over a three-year period, translating into an ROI of 443% by implementing a remote client solution. The report concludes that, "It's clear that the economic and security benefits of blade PC solutions such as HP's CCI, make them an attractive new choice."

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