ANALYST BRIEF
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Staff shortages, funding challenges, data security issues, and volatile work environments have driven an increased interest in desktop as a service.

Using Desktop as a Service to Meet Modern Operational Needs

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Introduction

After five years of embracing remote work, there has been a marked shift toward a return to the office, with 39% of global companies indicating that they expect workers to be onsite full time (see *Worldwide Employee Experience Trends — Flexible Work Model,* IDC #US52943725, May 2025). However, this shift masks the underlying reality of hybrid work: Employees have become reliant not just on working remotely but on automation and the ability to work whenever and wherever they need to in order to drive increasingly digital business operations. Moving into a shared physical location will not reverse these trends.

AT A GLANCE

KEY STATS

According to IDC's research:

- 39% of global companies intend to be onsite with their expanded workforces.
- 40% of small and medium-sized businesses do not have IT support staff.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Desktop as a service helps organizations bridge the gap between a changing workforce's needs and the lack of IT staff to support those needs.

If anything, this return-to-office trend brings some of the underlying problems businesses now face into sharp relief. Over 40% of small and medium-sized businesses have no IT support staff at all; those that do have staff tend to have four or fewer generalists (see *How Do IT Maintenance and Management Resources Vary by SMB Size?,* IDC #US52022524, April 2024). These scarce resources must divide their time between working on security, managing the AI transformation, and supporting users in an often unfamiliar office environment that is poorly adapted to automated or asynchronous work, while simultaneously managing their own workloads. This added burden comes as organizations reallocate budgets away from the basics of running desktops and managing devices to higher-priority concerns, such as new AI applications, data breaches and ransomware attacks, centralized control, and compliance.

This combination of staff shortages, funding challenges, and volatile work environments has increased interest in desktop as a service (DaaS). Combining cloud-based, virtual desktop infrastructure with security, server, storage, network, and compute automations, DaaS allows an administrator or an enterprise to purchase secured digital workspaces, accessible from any device, at a predictable cost per user. Some instances go a step further and provide integrated device management, allowing overwhelmed IT organizations to turn their attention to other important matters.

Benefits

A predictable, scalable, and stable DaaS environment allows organizations to shift human and financial resources to higher-importance projects, reduce operations costs, and improve their security posture, leading to fewer incidents and less exposure to cyberthreats. Each of these actions helps boost overall productivity while delivering discrete benefits.

IT staff are in short supply and increasingly lack the specialized skills needed to secure and operate traditional virtual desktop systems. Even in cases where the individual staff member may possess those skills, having them work full-time to provide the security, collaboration, and resource management benefits delivered by virtual desktops is not always an optimal use of their time, especially when dealing with increasing pricing variability.

Predictable pricing allows organizations to estimate their forward operating costs and allocate financial resources toward future projects. This is particularly important in a technical era where consumption-based pricing means that even standard operations have a variable operating cost. IDC's *EMEA 2025 Digital Infrastructure Survey* finds that this planning benefit is important enough to lead 94% of respondents to cite "having stable and predictable pricing" as being moderately to extremely important, partly because fluctuations in cost can delay or derail other projects and programs. Predictability is also the foundation of zero-based budgeting, an increasingly common practice of reviewing and prioritizing all expenses on a quarterly or monthly basis.

At the same time, companies are not just looking to stabilize their costs; they need to reduce costs when and where possible. This cost reduction is part of the overall cloud operating model, where organizations can rapidly and effectively raise and lower capacity and the expenses associated with it based on their current and projected needs while balancing security and functionality. This allows them to become cloud-enabled businesses and focus on the activities, partnerships, and technologies that will transform their organizations.

Enterprises cannot achieve either of these cost benefits without ensuring that their digital workspace and the devices that access it are secure with a stable architecture and timely maintenance. However, implementing security draws resources away from the first two benefits, making them difficult to achieve even in the best-case scenarios. As such, DaaS provides a significant uplift in cloud resilience that in turn delivers a significant benefit for overall business resilience.

Considerations

DaaS exploded in the "anything goes" era of remote clients during the COVID-19 global pandemic, but it is not a panacea for all remote access or virtual desktop ills. Providers must trade off configurability for automation, users must give up some control in return for lower operational burden, and both face persistent misunderstandings about how DaaS fits into the larger security architecture.

The beating heart of DaaS is the extensive, adaptable, and persistent automation that makes it possible to rapidly provision and sunset hundreds of thousands of desktops in response to signals from the digital environment. Those signals may be as simple as a user log-in or as complex as the results of a cable being cut during a tropical storm on the other side of the world. Meeting this need requires the provider to simplify something. In most cases, they simplify the desktop image. That one image — which meets most (but not all) needs — becomes the de facto standard. This is fine for generic use cases, but almost all enterprises will find that over time, the images are too constricting for anywhere from 20% to 30% of their workforces.

To get the "swipe and use" simplicity of DaaS, IT managers give up control over managing the configuration, update cycles, hardware, and software stacks that make up the solution, as well as the data that the users access. This may be fine for some enterprise use cases where the organization either can't or doesn't want to maintain these tasks itself and trusts its provider to take them on. However, the highly automated and decentralized nature of an effective DaaS solution can become troublesome when the system must handle sensitive or sovereign data, regulatory or compliance concerns become paramount, or there are physical access requirements. To meet the full spectrum of use cases, many enterprises find that they must run a hybrid solution, with some DaaS and some self-managed traditional virtual desktop infrastructure. Others turn to regional partners with specific expertise to help construct a unified solution.

DaaS is part of the full spectrum of security solutions. It aims at both security and compliance because data is not held on distributed endpoints, update schedules automatically return to a known good state, and rapid service can be restored to a known good state in seconds. However, according to IDC's research over the past few years, it is rare for enterprises to involve their security teams in the DaaS discussion.

Trends

IDC sees the following trends playing out over the next five years: a steady migration toward virtual desktops, a decrease in the number of technical resources to do the work, and increased usage of AI in infrastructure functions.

By 2027, IDC predicts that somewhere from 25% to 30% of end users will access virtual desktops and over 50% will access one or more virtual applications each week. This growth will occur across all enterprise segments, with some concentration in small and medium-sized businesses and in sectors with strong field services organizations. The aforementioned benefits are driving this increase, but they will also fuel the demand for technical talent with the skills to manage virtualized environments or the need to outsource these skills.

IDC also predicts that by 2027, some 40% of IT operations roles will not be fillable in the G20 (see *Worldwide xOPs Census and Forecast, 2022–2027,* IDC #US50627023, May 2023). This talent gap will require a dramatic change in the way that organizations use staff to maintain their digital estate, shifting the mix in favor of highly automated solutions. This automation will have to provide the security, adaptability, and scalability required to maintain a "fit for purpose" approach.

Finally, the surge in agentic AI, although currently more buzz than reality, represents the emergence of a new kind of IT primitive, one in the same order of importance as machine-level code. Taking advantage of this new approach to computing will take time, but it will also lead to fundamentally different ways of interacting with computers and resources, as well as a reinvention of the desktop OS. In time, reinvention will add powerful capabilities that will be embedded in the digital workspace. It will also increase the complexity of managing these systems, which will require additional human and agentic effort, driving even more work into the rapidly changing IT workforce.

Conclusion

DaaS is a key solution for helping enterprises meet the demand for secure, highly available digital workspaces without imposing additional burdens on existing staff. However, organizations need to be aware that it is not a panacea; as with any attempt to gain the benefits of cloud, it does require that they willingly or by necessity give up some control over what may well be critical resources and requires careful assessment of the vendor's ability to provide enterprise-grade security of your environment, applications, and data. Finally, while DaaS is a ready-to-deploy technology, it remains to be seen how it will adapt to the era of agentic AI, both in terms of its own automations and the capabilities it provides to end users.

DaaS can help enterprises meet the demand for secure, highly available digital workspaces without imposing additional burdens on existing staff.

About the Analyst

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