



WHITE PAPER

THE THIN-CLIENT – THE NEXT PANACEA

The Thin Client – The Next Panacea?

Over the last year or two we have all heard about the death of client/server and the coming thin client revolution. There are three basic problems with this message:

- Thin client applications are client server in architecture; specifically, three tier client server architecture;
- One cannot redevelop fat clients into thin clients, it requires a complete redesign and rewrite (a very difficult and expensive process); and
- The development of true thin client applications is lagging way behind the market hype because it involves very new technology (sometimes not quite proven) and there are very few experienced technicians in this area.

So, client/server architecture is not dead and it will be some time before traditional heavy duty, mission critical 'fat' client/server applications are replaced with thin client versions.

Local Launch – Knowledgeone Corporation's RecFind

One company about to launch a thin client version of a traditional fat client application is Knowledgeone Corporation, makers of the RecFind product range.

Knowledgeone Corporation is redesigning their whole RecFind product range as a 32 bit, thin client product based on Microsoft's DCOM architecture. The first release will be RecQuery-TC, Knowledgeone Corporation's low cost search module designed to give as many employees of the enterprise as possible access to the RecFind knowledge database. RecQuery-TC will begin shipping to Knowledgeone Corporation customers in January, 1999.

RecQuery-TC lives within a browser, requires no resources from the local PC (other than memory) and communicates with the third tier SQL Server database server via Microsoft's NT based Internet Information Server (IIS).

What Do Thin Client Applications Offer The Enterprise?

The availability of thin client application software changes the whole paradigm of enterprise processing. Workers are no longer constrained by WAN bandwidth or even the availability of WAN networks. A user can connect to the database from anywhere in the world via the Internet. Desks and offices may soon become redundant.

In the same vein, the availability of thin client processing also changes the concept of what we do with enterprise databases. We can service our customers as well as our users using the same technology investment; there is no longer a need for disparate systems. Obviously, security becomes much more of an issue and we need to worry about implementing far more than mere firewalls to stem the tide of techno-crazies and malicious malcontents.

Why Move To Thin Client Processing?

Organizations will move to thin client processing for one or more of four reasons:

- Control, (no software is loaded at the local PC);
- Cost, (thin client applications require less hardware at the client side and significantly reduce communications costs);
- To bypass WAN bottlenecks; and

- To effect customer service delivery.

So What Is The Path Of The Thin Client Revolution?

In the short term, resource hungry fat client applications will be turned into pseudo thin clients by the use of such packages as WinFrame and Microsoft's Terminal Server. Knowledgeone Corporation for example, has written its own clever engines to convert its fat client version of RecFind into an 'almost' thin client product. It has produced two products; the Asynchronous Indexing Module (AIM) and the RecFind Print Server which reduce the WAN workload by as much as 95% when used with RecFind. For those clients stuck with traditional fat client server products, this is the way to go, improving performance despite bandwidth problems.

In the medium term (the next year or two), enterprises will run a mix of applications, some as fat clients, some running under systems such as Terminal Server and some as true thin clients.

In the long term, all mission critical applications, including giants like SAP, will be delivered in a true thin client form. The savings and benefits are just too great for any enterprise to ignore this revolution.

*Written by Frank McKenna, CEO Knowledgeone Corporation
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