DELL EMC

THE NEED FOR SPEED IN THE FEDERAL IT LIFECYCLE

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Federal IT leaders face numerous challenges in an austere budgetary climate. One of the biggest is the inability to efficiently retire old IT client systems and upgrade to newer ones. The opportunity lost is huge – over the past 15 years, there have been incredible advances in the speed of software development. This acceleration in innovation offers updated IT functionality that can address many of today's federal IT challenges with old technology that is not being replaced fast enough.

Historically in federal IT, lifecycle change meant the risk of disruption to critical IT functionality. According to a survey conducted earlier this year by Government Business Council, 42 percent of respondents felt their agency is not effective at managing the lifecycle of its IT client systems. A sobering 46 percent felt that their current IT system – primarily their PC - is inferior to comparable systems and software available to them as private citizens.

An incredible 40 percent of IT budgets is spent on PC lifecycle management in the private sector, and that number is no doubt higher in the Federal sector.

It doesn't have to be this way. Upgrading to a newer, more powerful PC can and should be as easy as purchasing a new smartphone. We've all done that as consumers – we hand our old phone in, and get a brand new one with all our contacts, our applications, our data and a bunch of new features. With PC upgrades there should be no disruption of critical resources needed to support the mission. The PC should arrive, be unboxed, plugged, user apps and data are replicated on the new device, the old one is swapped out and five minutes later that critical resource and employee are back to work.

An incredible 40 percent of IT budgets is spent on PC lifecycle management in the private sector, and that number is no doubt higher in the Federal sector. PC lifecycle management can be understood as a constant process with four distinct phases: Plan and Design; Deploy and Integrate; Manage and Support; Retire and Recover. Currently, each phase takes too long in federal agencies.

These delayed lifecycle phases have always been a challenge, but

they are particularly damaging today. The explosion of innovation on the software side of the fence – agile sprints, continuous integration, and continuous build – has opened up a yawning gap between the development side (Dev) and the operations side (Ops) of IT. The former measures progress in hours, days, and weeks; the latter in years.

For example, Microsoft releases updates to Windows constantly, sometimes in as little time as an hour. Operations teams everywhere struggle to keep up, not just those in the federal sector. These updates reflect patches for better cybersecurity, enhanced processing power or new features and functionality to tackle new tasks. After all, it's about the mission and not the tools – IT exists to help agencies perform better.

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There are ways ops teams can maintain stability while also speeding up the adoption of these developmental improvements - decoupling IT components is one example. For maximum speed and flexibility, every component in the PC lifecycle stack should be as self-sufficient as possible, only dependent on its inputs and outputs. This allows updating of components, such as the operating system, without worrying about compatibility or instability issues.

Unfortunately most federal PC lifecycle components are not decoupled from other components. Too often, mandating a specific version of one component (e.g. the OS) requires supporting a particular version of an application. A well-known example was the requirement to use a specific version of the Windows Explorer browser on many government PCs, long after other browsers like Chrome and Firefox became more popular. The migration to Microsoft Windows 10 should assist in this area, because Microsoft is decoupling many core services from the operating system itself. Again, make the

tools conform to the mission, not the other way around.

Many federal agencies are in the midst of transitioning to Windows 10, and the user feedback has been positive. Dell EMC has been the number one deployment partner with Microsoft for the past seven years. They have staff exclusively certified to handle Windows 10 migrations for clients, and hold six method patents covering how to do so in the safest and most efficient manner possible.

Based on the client deployments with Dell EMC, these three steps are best practices for federal IT executives looking to speed their IT lifecycle management:

- Set clear objectives (these should be focused on better achieving the mission, not technology per se)
- Establish current situational awareness (what's the current baseline, gating items, etc.)
- Construct a strategic plan mapped out in phases in order to effectively deploy Windows 10.

Easier said than done, of course, but Dell EMC has personnel teams that assist clients with every step of the PC lifecycle process. A faster and more efficient PC lifecycle process can close the gap between development and operations, putting more IT power at the disposal of government agencies and employees.

Done properly, IT PC lifecycle management is a process that never stands still. Proven best practices exist that the government can adopt to speed up its PC technology refresh cycles. Large-scale Windows 10 deployments, such as those occurring at the Department of Defense, indicate that leadership understands change is needed.

Those who dedicate their careers to service deserve the best tools possible to help them do the best job possible.

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