

Remote Users In The Frame at Scottish University Of The Year¹

Robert Gordon University Deploys Nutanix Frame To Deliver Virtual Desktops And Apps To Remote Schools And Graduate Apprentices

INDUSTRY

Higher Education

BENEFITS

- Highly scalable DaaS solution that can be hosted on most public and private clouds or on-premise with Nutanix
- Simple to use with a browser the only prerequisite for access
- Single integrated management console compared to 6 or 7 with University's existing EUC platform

SOLUTION

- Nutanix Frame hosted on-premise by a 3-node Nutanix Cloud Platform cluster
- AHV hypervisor

APPLICATIONS

- Virtual Windows and Linux desktops
- Productivity apps
- Specialist apps for Schools of Architecture and Engineering including AutoCAD and Revit

BUSINESS NEED

Robert Gordon University was keen to extend the reach of its End User Computing (EUC) solution, beyond on-campus students to more demanding remote users in Schools of Architecture and Engineering, plus Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) students working for an employer whilst studying. The complexity and high level of support required of its existing EUC platform, however, threatened to make this a daunting and time consuming task. A task made yet more problematic by the need for client software to be installed and managed on user devices and other components to be deployed on networks belonging to GA employers.

Then along came Covid-19, making the requirement for a more practical yet equally capable and scalable EUC solution for remote users even more pressing.

“The more we spoke to other customers and tried it out for ourselves the more we came to see Frame as a perfect fit for this particular cohort of remote users. No need for client software – just a browser – no plug-ins or infrastructure changes and everything managed through a single console instead of 6 or 7 as with our existing EUC platform. It was staggering how little effort was needed!”

– Timon Watson – End User Computing Team Leader, Robert Gordon University

¹ RGU named Scottish university of the year

CHALLENGE

The IT Team at Robert Gordon University had successfully implemented a comprehensive EUC (End User Computing) strategy, giving students access to virtual desktops and apps through its shared on-campus IT Labs and libraries. The next challenge was to extend that capability to a wider audience, principally more demanding researchers in Schools of Architecture and Engineering plus students on the Scottish Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) scheme who would be studying remotely whilst working.

Adding those users to its existing solution, however, was not as straightforward as might be expected as Timon Watson, End User Computing Team Leader at Robert Gordon University explains:

“Traditional EUC solutions have high barriers to entry particularly, when it comes to supporting graphically intense workloads. Not just the need for clients on end user devices but the infrastructure required to support advanced 3D features and preserve settings between sessions and across devices. Getting the software needed installed and working can be hard. Managing it and troubleshooting problems remotely when they arise harder still and extremely time consuming even for fully trained staff.”

SOLUTION

As an existing Nutanix customer it wasn't long before the team at Robert Gordon University was introduced to Nutanix Frame by Master partner, ET Works. As a Desktop as a Service solution, Frame is a much simpler and easy to manage EUC solution which was suggested as a more suitable alternative in this instance.

“I'll admit we were very sceptical,” said Watson, “not that it wouldn't work, but that Frame wouldn't match our previous solution in terms of capabilities and performance or be any easier to set up and manage. But the more we spoke to other customers and tried it out for ourselves the more we came to see Frame as a perfect fit for this particular cohort of remote users. No need for client software – just a browser – no plug-ins or infrastructure changes and everything managed through a single console. It was staggering how little effort was needed!”

Another advantage of Frame is that, as a cloud native application, it can be deployed on all the leading public and private cloud platforms. It can also be hosted on-premise using the Nutanix Cloud Platform running the AHV hypervisor. This was the option chosen by Watson with the University purchasing a 3-node Nutanix cluster and 100 Frame licences for the initial rollout to the School of Architecture and Graduate Apprenticeship users.

CUSTOMER OUTCOMES

Following a short hiatus (due to the UK-wide Covid-19 lockdown) setup of the Nutanix cluster and Frame EUC platform started in earnest. This was completed in just days and by team members with no prior experience of either Frame or its management.

“I wasn't looking forward to doing this project, but I love Frame” commented Kevin Watt, team member responsible for application setup. “Users can manage a lot of their settings themselves and compared to the days or even weeks needed to push out apps previously, with Frame it just takes a few hours of setup time then a click of the “publish” button and it's done.”

Despite being early days, Watson is also more than pleased by the lack of support calls following Frame deployment.

“As power users of applications like AutoCAD and Revit the School of Architecture was our most demanding cohort of users when it came to on-premise support. I don't think we've had a single call since moving them onto Frame.”

NEXT STEPS

Like so many organisations, the pandemic has caused Robert Gordon University to re-examine its computing strategy, in particular to move away from on-premise desktops and allow remote access from a much wider range of devices. In the short term the previous solution has been adapted to support wider remote teaching and learning, but additional use of Nutanix Frame is planned.

Looking forward, Watson is keen to make use of Nutanix Calm to automate the processes of application deployment and is also investigating use of Nutanix Flow, for network segmentation and secure VDI.



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