MICROLAND®

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR WINDOWS 10 INVESTMENT: MOVING FROM 'BIG BANG UPGRADES' TO A NIMBLE AND CONTINUOUS APPROACH

WHITEPAPER

Getting the most out of your Windows 10 investment: Moving from 'Big Bang Updates' to a nimble and continuous approach

Abstract

Every IT organization will agree that operating system (OS) upgrades – both on the desktop and server side -can be a tedious, time consuming, and expensive process. How then can CIOs and CTOs embrace major technology shifts at the pace modern business demands while simultaneously delivering business benefits? The answer lies in Evergreen IT – a move that Microsoft has made by launching Windows 10 as a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform. The Windows as a Service (WaaS) offering aims to help enterprise IT stay current, with the latest OS features and updates delivered frequently, in a user-friendly manner.

This paper highlights what's new in WaaS, how to go about implementing it, the associated challenges, and the value that a specialized partner can bring in helping enterprises keep their Windows 10 environment up to date.

Windows as a Service: Moving from project to process

At a time when agility is the new currency in a mobility-first world, Microsoft is moving to an agile model for applying updates to Windows 10 in a bid to enhance user experience. It now offers Windows as a Service (WaaS) and urges enterprises to approach OS updates as an ongoing process, as opposed to the traditional project-based approach. In an effort to simplify deployment planning and make OS releases predictable, Microsoft will now release Windows 10 incremental feature updates twice a year, (not once in five years as was the practice earlier). Further, Microsoft's support for each update pack lasts only 18 months from the date of its release. This means enterprises must migrate to the new build within 18 months to avoid a sudden lapse in service. WaaS is a whole new paradigm that:

- Delivers new value, features and capabilities to enterprises at an accelerated pace, minimizing end-user disruption by ensuring fewer changes with each release
- Provides unmatched flexibility and control to IT through exceptional application compatibility and significantly simplified deployments
- Continually improves security, reliability, and performance, mitigating risk of cyber attacks and threats
- Deeply integrates with cloud services to add functionality and simplify the process of staying current through Windows Analytics and automated updates management

In essence, Windows 10 presents the ideal opportunity for digital transformation that companies are looking for. But are IT leaders and executives ready for this new approach to keep Windows 10 up to date? For nearly a quarter-century, organizations running on Windows OS have acquired something of a 'set-and-forget' mentality as far as upgrades are concerned. With WaaS aggressive rolling update cycles, this is set to change.

Windows as a Service: It is not without its challenges

For Windows users, the days of relying on tried-and-tested workflows are over as Microsoft prepares to tackle the thorny issue of OS upgrades with the introduction of rolling semi-annual feature updates, combined with monthly and cumulative quality updates. However, as enterprises make the massive leap to embrace an Evergreen Desktop Environment and WaaS, inherent challenges and risks face them. This is not limited to Windows 10 only. The ramifications of continuous updates affect the entire Microsoft stack, the full platform and support infrastructure, and even the non-Microsoft applications an enterprise may be running.

Let's deep dive into the five key challenges of transitioning to Windows 10 rolling updates:

#1 Patching and application compatibility:

The cumulative all-or-nothing nature of Windows 10 updates poses the biggest challenge for enterprises. Unlike previous versions of Windows upgrades that could be unbundled, giving enterprises the flexibility to pick and choose what they wanted, all security and reliability patches in the new update model are bundled. While Microsoft's justification here is that engineers get to use a fully patched system as the baseline to test new updates, enterprises now have a pressing problem. Patches are known to break third party applications frequently. For many years enterprises tackled this challenge by simply refusing to install the problematic patches. They could easily offset the risk of vulnerability from a single patch by maintaining application availability instead.

With Windows as a Service, patch exclusion is no longer an option as avoiding a large monthly update could expose the enterprise to multiple vulnerabilities. Add to it the fact that the problem patch will be included in all future updates and it's easy to see how risk can get quickly compounded.

QUICK TAKE

The root cause of Windows 10 issues is: diversity in the Windows PC universe, which makes it impossible to test every combination of hardware and software in order to predict issues.

#2 Shrinking update cycles:

With WaaS, feature updates happen every 6 months, as opposed to the earlier upgrade versions that enterprises could stick with for nearly a decade, without making any changes. What's more – an update can only be deferred for 18 months, not refused completely. This makes it imperative for enterprises to pay close attention to not just what's new in the current update but also what's in the pipeline for the next one. Microsoft plans to tighten the update cycle further, making it challenging for businesses of all sizes to ensure the time and/or technical expertise required to understand, test and implement each new feature update. Failure to test can result in major disruptions to business continuity, if an update breaks compatibility with a business-critical third-party application.

#3 Update size and build model:

On an average, a Windows 10 update is over 11 times the size of Windows 8.1 patches, since they are cumulative in nature. Build updates are similar to service packs but with a difference - they are released more frequently with updates expected semi-annually. Enterprises are forced to plan for the new bi-annual downtime (that can range from roughly 60-90 minutes or more, depending on the size of the upgrade). They will also need to push updates in a manner that their network bandwidth and end user storage capacity can support.

What's more, enterprises won't have the option to stay on Windows 10 build beyond 14-18 months. That's because security patches will not be delivered to the build once the subsequent two builds have been released, exposing individual systems to serious risk. Going forward, enterprises will need to develop a robust update process to ensure all their computers are on a supported build.

#4 Elaborate WaaS team set-up:

Switching to Windows 10 rolling updates is likely to increase the existing IT team effort by 30-40%. This is because the new mandates include: remaining up-to-date on new feature releases, evaluating them by performing hardware and software compatibility check, implementing the build in a test environment to iron out kinks, and finally, ensuring ring-based deployment on a large scale. Enterprises will need to deploy a dedicated WaaS team or set up a Windows 10 Center of Excellence (CoE) to achieve these objectives and enable automation of the WaaS process to accelerate update deployment.

#5 Updating SCCM and Intune:

Updating Windows 10 requires enterprises using System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM), the PC and server management software, to upgrade it as well. SCCM integrates with Intune - the standalone multiplatform desktop and mobile application management service - using connector software, in what is termed as the 'hybrid approach'. Microsoft recommends using the hybrid approach for managing more than 50,000 devices and Intune for less than 50,000 devices. Organizations will need to choose the right client management solution (SCCM or Intune) or adopt the hybrid approach, depending on what fits them best.

An experienced partner can cost-effectively keep your Windows 10 environment evergreen

WaaS is ushering a new era of IT performance where overall product reliability, security, and user experience has improved dramatically - by up to 90%. On the flip side, there is a significant increase in work load for the IT function, resulting in disruption of user productivity timelines by approximately 20%. To become an evergreen-ready IT organization capable of implementing rolling upgrades, IT must focus on three key areas: infrastructure readiness, application compatibility validation, and Windows 10 build and update readiness.

Partnering with a trusted and experienced vendor can bring significant benefits for an enterprise looking to maintain the Windows 10 environment, in addition to lowering cost and resource requirements:

QUICK TAKE

Working with the right partner enables:

- Optimization of Windows 10 environment for superior ROI
- Lower operational costs at superior quality, value, and ongoing innovation
- Best-in-class managed services

#1 Focused Windows 10 Center of Excellence:

An experienced partner with a CoE is well positioned to deploy a team of experts trained in exploring, researching and testing what's new in Windows 10, its impact, etc. Such teams typically work closely with Microsoft and other ISVs during the beta release and are privy to insider preview builds. This ensures they are better prepared for the final build. Maintaining such an advanced setup in-house can mean significant cost, time, and resource investment for an enterprise.

#2 Cross-deployment experience:

Implementation partners usually work with a variety of clients across industries, enabling them to leverage their experience and learnings from diverse environments to fast track the overall deployment of Windows 10 feature updates. Wide-ranging expertise also enables partners to identify potential risks and apply appropriate fixes before issues arise, thereby significantly enhancing the end user experience and satisfaction.

#3 Seamless large-scale deployments:

Progressing from pilot deployment to a large scale deployment across the entire user base, comprising all the devices in the organization requires significant expertise with a sharp focus on risk reduction. An experienced partner helps assess the impact on network (LAN/WAN) bandwidth, user adoption, and productivity downtime - before undertaking deployment at scale.

#4 Utilizing an industrialized approach:

By leveraging proven best practices, experienced vendors can cost-effectively accelerate rolling updates and reduce disruptive (such as bulk rollout) or expensive rollout models (such as build & dispatch, migration factory, or engineer assisted deployments). They can help organizations seamlessly transition from a project-based to process-driven mindset, ensuring ongoing application and image testing.

Embracing an evergreen Windows environment

Ultimately, keeping the Windows 10 environment evergreen is all about embracing the new approach in order to support users continuously, consistently, and cost-effectively. Success for enterprises will lie in their ability to effectively support their end users in the new environment, as most people resist change or see change as loss of control. Deploying training on new features and constant communication can help drive wide scale adoption and acceptance of the new approach.

Why work with Microland

What makes Microland the partner of choice for companies looking to optimize and stay in control of their Windows 10 environment?Microland's Windows 10 services span four categories namely: Windows 10 readiness services, image engineering services, migration services, and Windows 10 evergreen services. We leverage our Evergreen Cockpit portal to conduct advisory reportingandimpact analysis of every release within 15 days of final build release by Microsoft.This ensuresclient IT teams are always apprised of new features and functionalities and helps them identify compatibility risks, thereby providing adequate time for action.

We ensure frictionless updatesby enabling near real-time visibility into update cycles,automated testing of applications, build, and deployment compatibility for every new release.Our end-to-end modular services enable clients to choose modules during update cycles, improving services without adding unnecessary costs and management overheads.Microlandhas a long history of working with Microsoft and frequently participates in beta testing new update features and functionalities,further strengthening its core expertise in Windows 10.

About the author

Raj Kumar Thakur
Sr. Director, Digital workplace services, Microland

Raj Kumar Thakur is a Sr. Director at Microland and leads the Digital workplace services. As part of this role, he is responsible for building service capabilities in the areas of digital workplace, cloud-based messaging and collaboration, and NextGen end user support ecosystem. He has over 18 years of experience in the IT Infrastructure Management space and in his previous roles at Microland, he has led the company's ITSM consulting practice with a focus on IT Operation Strategy Consulting, ITIL and ISO 20000 Consulting services. Raj is a certified ITIL®V3 Expert with very strong IT operations and ITSM consulting background and has successfully taken many global organizations through their IT service improvement journeys.

For further information
Contact us at: **+1 646-254-3598** or Email us at: **info@microland.com**

About Microland

Microland accelerates the digital transformation journey for global enterprises enabling them to deliver high-value business outcomes and superior customer experience. Headquartered in Bangalore, India, Microland has more than 3,800 professionals across its offices in Australia, Europe, India, Middle East and North America. Microland partners with global enterprises to help them become more agile and innovative by integrating emerging technologies and applying automation, analytics and predictive intelligence to business processes.

Learn more about us at:

www.microland.com