

CASE STUDY



» Hilfswerk - The Lower Austria Relief Agency «

“Through the combination of terminal servers, Citrix[®] XenApp, Thin Clients running Stratodesk’s NoTouch Desktop software solution and repurposed traditional desktop computers, the small IT team from the Lower Austria Relief Agency Hilfswerk were able to drastically reduce hardware costs, simplify network management and significantly increase their IT efficiency.”

Thomas SCHOPF, IT Director Lower austrian Relief Agency

The Customer

“Quality from person to person”—this is the motto that has driven the Lower Austria Relief Agency (Hilfswerk) through over 35 years of providing a comprehensive range of social aid services to people from all walks of life with support for their everyday needs. Hilfswerk provides all kinds of assistance, ranging from in-home care for seniors and the elderly to childcare, family counseling and therapy.

Founded in February of 1978, the Lower Austria Relief Agency has successfully carried out the concept of a private, non-profit charitable organization for family assistance. Hilfswerk currently has over 4,000 employees who, together with an additional

3,000 volunteers, provide assistance for over 25,000 individuals and families per month. The relief agency is therefore currently the largest social organization in the largest state in Austria.

The relief agency’s aid workers in Lower Austria provide a variety of everyday services for seniors as well as those suffering from disabilities and/or chronic illness in the familiarity of their own home, helping them maintain an independent life. Additionally, Hilfswerk currently operates twelve family centers and counseling centers, which offer services such as childcare, tutoring, counseling, psychotherapy and social work. Overall, working together with 67 partner associations in almost 200 locations, the relief agency’s presence is felt in almost every community in Lower Austria.

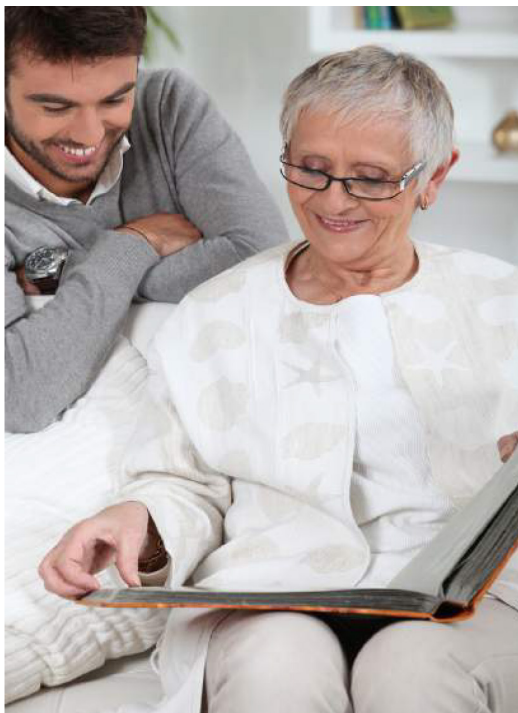


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The Challenge

The Lower Austria Relief Agency isn't just a leader in the field of social services. For several years, the agency has also been a forerunner in the realm of IT efficiency. The basis for this approach was the problems that began plaguing their decentralized network in the summer of 2002. At the time, Hilfswerk had more than 450 "fat clients" in use in over 100 agency locations across Lower Austria, which were connected to the agency's headquarters in the city of St. Pölten via ISDN Dialup. "At the time, our clients were lagging behind the newest technology. In order to install various long-needed system updates, more than half of our IT hardware would have been replaced. Additionally, due to our decentralized infrastructure, each and every program update turned into a tedious and lengthy task," remembers Thomas Schöpf, Hilfswerk IT Director about the situation, which was characterized by a widely distributed IT infrastructure, slow connections and high-traffic applications.



In order to tackle the agency's growing IT problems, Schöpf and his team ultimately decided on adopting a central network concept. "We came to the decision that a terminal server was the only option that really made any sense." The new network architecture was implemented in the first half of the year in 2013, complete with the Citrix® Terminal Server Solution XenApp 5.0. The positive results were quickly noticed: through the implementation of the Server Based Computing concept,

according to Schöpf "on the user side, usability was immediately improved throughout the IT program as a whole. At the same time, installations of new programs and updates became much easier for the IT team, as it is all managed centrally via the terminal server."

With the transition to the new architecture determined, Hilfswerk was still faced with the question of which endpoint devices would best fit their new central IT infrastructure, and additionally, what they would do with their traditional, largely outdated, Windows desktops. An intensive search for suitable solutions included discussions with suppliers, online research, visits to trade shows as well as personal interviews with several manufacturers. "During the product search, the most important criterion was the ability to continue using our existing hardware and a connection to a competent contact person who could display a quick reaction time in dealing with problems. Equally important was a uniform management interface for both existing and new hardware, to keep administrative overhead as low as possible," says Schöpf.

The Stratodesk Solution

After comprehensive evaluation of the top solution providers, Schöpf and his team made the decisive decision to use Thin Client endpoints and engaged Stratodesk as a partner. In addition to the NoTouch OS, the devices support a wide array of other services, including an up-to-date Firefox browser, a PDF reader, terminal emulations as well as a Thin-Print Client, the optimum support for network printing.

Stratodesk's NoTouch OS is extremely easy to use. The minimum-footprint OS includes various protocols, connection brokers, software clients and tools which allow for a variety of connection options, providing users with simple and seamless access to data and applications, not only in server-based computing scenarios, but also in VDI and Cloud environments.

The Lower Austria Relief Agency chose to provide employees with around 230 Thin Client devices equipped with Stratodesk's NoTouch Desktop solution. The devices retrieve both data and applications from the agency's 40 terminal servers, which are currently transitioning from XenApp 5.0 to version 6.0.

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“By switching over to Thin Clients running NoTouch Desktop, our computer network has become significantly more user-friendly. At the same time, the clients require noticeably less maintenance from the IT department,” says Schöpf about the positive effects of the agency’s transition to Thin Clients. The IT director is especially impressed with the stability of the clients, and the ease of manageability through the central management console (NoTouch Center): “For our agency, the most important thing was to find reliable Thin Clients that could be easily managed.” The web-based NoTouch Center is an efficient and extremely user-friendly management software, which enables network administrators to, for example, distribute images and update or configure devices, all from their browser, which keeps network administration overhead to an absolute minimum.



In addition to providing Thin Clients running NoTouch Desktop, Stratodesk also aided Hilfswerk in identifying a solution to save even more while simultaneously increasing their IT efficiency: by installing NoTouch Desktop on their aging PCs, Schöpf and his team were able to continue using their existing hardware as software Thin Clients, instead of simply replacing them with new, expensive hardware. Due to the fact that the PC repurposing solution from Stratodesk works on any hardware, the agency was effectively able to integrate their traditional, outdated desktops into their new, centrally-managed virtualized environment. The lean, minimum-footprint NoTouch OS replaced the existing operating system (typically Windows) on the aging devices, efficiently transforming the aging desktops into software based Thin Clients. The solution is entirely hardware independent, allowing customers to centrally manage PCs, laptops and Thin Clients from any vendor all within the same environment.

“Through the use of Thin Clients running NoTouch Desktop, we save ourselves the high costs of ongoing hardware investments, and the outstanding management console allows us to focus on project development instead of network administration.”

Schöpf is full of praise for the solution, which is currently running on approximately 230 Thin Clients and approximately 190 repurposed PCs: “From our point of view, NoTouch Desktop is without a doubt the best way to re-use aging hardware and integrate it in a virtualized management environment.”

Multifaceted Cost Reduction

For Hilfswerk, cooperation with Stratodesk meant a dramatic reduction in the financial burden of migrating a complex network of decentralized endpoints to a new virtualized infrastructure. Through the use of Thin Clients running NoTouch, combined with the effort of repurposing existing hardware to software based Thin Clients, the agency was able to achieve “concrete savings with regard to hardware investment.” Additionally, the social aid agency’s IT director emphasizes that the choice of Thin Clients “has definitely paid off. Our helpdesk is run by only three people, which is possible solely because our endpoints require little to no maintenance. This has led to fewer helpdesk calls and more satisfied users, which, in turn, means reduced helpdesk costs.”

Schöpf estimates that collaboration with Stratodesk was even more valuable in terms of the benefits of using the Austro-American company’s product line. During the process of searching for a suitable solution, he was impressed by Stratodesk’s approach: “No hardware manufacturer can offer the flexibility and freedom of choice that Stratodesk offers to its customers.” Additionally, support during the test phase, including a personal visit from Stratodesk CEO, Emanuel Pirker, solidified a positive impression on Hilfswerk’s IT Director. “Our requests are always taken into account, and we are also able to suggest and incorporate new ideas.”

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Summary

In hindsight, Schöpf sees the complementary functional and financial benefits of implementing Thin Clients running NoTouch and repurposing existing hardware with the NoTouch solution as the most important positive aspects of the collaboration between the Lower Austria Relief Agency and Stratodesk. “We have greatly benefited from not only reduced hardware costs but also simplified client network management.” But the IT Director is also satisfied with other aspects of working together with Stratodesk: “Cooperation with Stratodesk has been extremely positive for our organization. The company not only offers creative, tailor-made solutions, but does so quickly, whenever we need it.” Schöpf’s conclusive remarks are also full of praise for the company: “In partnering with Stratodesk, we have effectively secured the best partner for Thin Client solutions.”

“We first introduced the Thin Clients running NoTouch Desktop and the NoTouch repurposing solution over ten years ago, and looking back I can say that this is one of the best decisions that we made”

