

Supporting Thin Client/Server Architecture


By Jeff Ash

In the Unix and mainframe world, the thin client/server paradigm has been the solution of choice for many years. However, until recently, this technology was not used in applications designed to run on the desktop PC. With the advent of products such as Citrix Winframe, Citrix Metaframe and Microsoft Windows NT Terminal Server, the scalable and easily maintainable environment of the thin client/server world is now available to those who prefer, or require, the Windows platform. With the release of Visual PRO/5® version 2.03 (2.04 for the NetWare port) and the PRO/5 Data Server® for Windows NT, BASIS now supports the use of these products on Citrix Winframe 1.7, Citrix Metaframe 1.0 and the Microsoft Windows NT Server 4.0, Terminal Server Edition.

The basic concept behind Citrix and NT Terminal Server is simple. The server is where the application actually executes and where all the work occurs. This must be a Windows NT 3.51 system using Citrix Winframe, or an NT Terminal Server system running standalone or with Citrix Metaframe. The client is a PC, Unix or Macintosh system that basically provides a "window" through which the user can interact with the application being run on the server. Because all the work in this kind of environment is being done on the server, the client machine need only have the power to run the client, which is minimal. The advantage that excites information technology professionals, especially system administrators, is the fact that the applications do not need to be installed and configured on each user's machine but only on the server or servers.

One of the things that makes Citrix and NT Terminal Server such great solutions is that there is not much configuration to do when dealing with a simple setup. The applications are installed on the server just as they would be on a desktop PC, and the operation will be seamless to the user. The primary consideration in using one of these solutions is in the area of performance. Because each keystroke, mouse click or other user action must be passed from the client to the server and any display information passed back from the server to the client, response times can vary depending on the speed of the user's network connection. Fortunately, this is often unnoticeable to the user.

Based on feedback from BASIS customers who use Citrix and NT Terminal Server, we've found that the minimum system recommendations made in the packages' documentation are not sufficient to run BASIS products. For systems running Visual PRO/5, BASIS recommends a server with two Pentium processors and 256 to 512 MB of RAM for every 25 simultaneous users, as well as plenty of hard disk space to accommodate temporary files and other disk storage for each user. Of course, these recommendations depend on the processing power required by the users' applications.

As the information technology community moves toward the thin client/server architecture on the Windows platform, BASIS is committed to continuing to provide cutting-edge solutions to its customers. With the use of Citrix and/or NT Terminal Server, Windows and desktop PC users can now utilize thin client/server technology with the new releases of BASIS products. Keep watch for some exciting new BASIS products utilizing thin client/server technology in the coming months. 

For more information about Citrix, visit www.citrix.com. For more information about the NT Terminal Server, visit Microsoft at www.microsoft.com.