April 1, 1998, 8:30 AM EST

Workspace On Demand?

By Esther Schindler, Sm@rt Reseller

🖼 E-mail To A Customer!
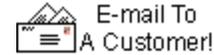
It's one of the first Network Computer Solutions to Hit the market, but Will Customers Demand...Workspace On Demand?

IBM's Workspace On Demand for OS/2 warp server is among the first opportunities to sell network computers and server-managed solutions. But how much do you have to invest and can you really make a profit selling it? If you lack OS/2 expertise, you probably can't. But if your company has the technical knowledge and customers with a certain class of requirements, the opportunities may be much larger than are immediately apparent.

The client desktop is minimal with only objects established by the net administrator. All configuration, management and maintenance is centralized at the server. As a result, a client never needs to be touched—not even digitally. Server software upgrades automatically update the client's software at the next login.

WSOD is aimed at large companies with major investments in transaction-based applications that are already using OS/2 servers, according to Jim Koerner, director of marketing programs at IBM's Network Computing Software Division. So, at a financial institution or customer service center, where end users run only a few applications, WSOD may be an easy sell. And don't forget, IBM has sold 600,000 OS/2 Warp Server licenses in the last two years, according to International Data Corp. of Framingham, Mass.

In addition, Sm@rt Reseller spoke with business partners and software vendors, who see business opportunities far exceeding IBM's vision. One VAR points out that the reduced customer support requirements will let him bid IBM NC solutions at prices 35 percent lower than his non-NC competition.

"The thin-client model is good for any vertical market," says Bob St. John, a manager at Serenity Systems International, who is building a multivendor solution around WSOD . "Any hardware, even a hard disk, is just one more thing that can go wrong."

Because OS/2 is so reliable, says St. John, the telephony VAR can include more phone lines on each card, lower his price and win more sales. However, resellers say installation isn't smooth and hardware support has many variables.

For resellers supporting large corporations with investments in OS/2, WSOD "is a no-brainer," according to Greg Shah, president of Golden Code, a high-end systems integrator with Fortune 1000 clients. "They're excited to hear about OS/2 again."

Other resellers who support enterprise environments share his enthusiasm. "We have been diligently shaking down this technology," says Dale McCallon, vice president of advanced technologies at Volt Information Sciences, an integrated information technology services and systems company. "We intend to roll it out as a long-term strategy in our own corporation, in 300 offices across the U.S."

To sell and support WSOD, you must be an IBM business partner. In addition to a firm grounding in OS/2 Warp Server technology, you'll need a three-day class from IBM, which is free until June.

But to buy into IBM's WSOD vision as solely a large-shop replacement for LAN Server, you'll need more than training. You'll need IBM's recognition and attention. Although IBM says that it will work with its business partners to provide services to

enterprise customers, resellers lacking established IBM relationships may feel they're competing for the same sale.That variability is yet another reason to ignore IBM's market strategies and invent your own.

"An end-user shop won't set this up themselves. A services deal goes along with this," says Randell Flint, president of software developer and integrator Sundial Systems. Resellers who supply customers with WSOD and hardware, software, migration planning, installation, training, configuration and integration testing—will find there are serious bucks to be made. ▌

To NC. . .

1. IBM's reputation and resources. Resellers say that IBM has impressive technical talent, customer awareness and a long-established relationship with its key customers. "We saw a strong commitment on IBM's part for this type of architecture," says Volt's Dale McCallon.

2. The specialized market. If the end users you support use only a few applications, require centralized control, or need to keep legacy applications or computer systems in use, this technology might offer benefits your customers understand.

3. They can pay you now, or they can pay you later. IBM says that WSOD will deliver lower cost of ownership over time. However, the customer's money will be spent up front. Since WSOD is too complex to be installed by even the most avid technology enthusiast over a weekend, the customers need your expertise.

4. Technology capable of growing with the times. IBM stresses that, while its network computing vision embraces Java, customers can use their existing OS/2, DOS, and 16-bit Windows applications. Java isn't required to realize the benefits.

5. The Warp Factor. **WorkSpace On Demand** is based on OS/2 Warp Server. Clients remotely boot from the WSOD server. At boot time, the client's desktop and system configuration are loaded onto the workstation based on the user's log-in. If a computer breaks, just swap it with another machine.

. . .Or Not To NC

1. IBM's reputation and resources. This can also be a problem: Many VARs Sm@rt Reseller spoke with were dubious about IBM's technical and marketing follow-through, especially in regard to any OS/2-based product. "Business partners are suffering because of IBM's inability to execute," says one reseller, who asked not to be named. Adds another: "IBM isn't perceived as supporting OS/2. Plus, they've never been very good at courting resellers."

2. The specialized market. IBM is the first to admit that NCs aren't for everyone. It's probably unsuitable for customers who absolutely require 32-bit Windows applications, or high-demand users such as graphics or CAD professionals.

3. Your technical knowledge. If you don't know OS/2 Warp Server, it will be costly and time-consuming to come up to speed. If you do know OS/2, you can smoke your competition. And if not, you may not be out of the running; IBM says that it will "broaden this to other platforms," but won't confirm dates or operating systems. So, why invest in the technology now, when all you have to do is wait?

4. Resistance to network computing. Technically savvy end-users resent the "big brother" mentality behind administrator-run desktops. One described WSOD as "czar-controlled kiosks."

5. The technology isn't easy. The WSOD model is best suited for environments where the hardware is identical across the enterprise. Be prepared: The installation process is not smooth.

ZDNet

Reviews | News | Downloads | Shop | MyZDNet | Games | ZDTV | Forums
AnchorDesk | PC Magazine | PC Week | Help! | Yahoo! Internet Life

HOME | FREE MEMBERSHIP | CONTACT ZD | AD INFO | ZIFF-DAVIS

⊡ Click here to enroll in the Quantum Access program