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ACP and CITRIX

This article covers the most common features found in the Thin Client management software packages from ACP (ThinManager) and Citrix (Presentation Manager, previously called MetaFrame).

Both products are enhancements to the basic Terminal Server operating systems offered by Microsoft. Some Thin Client systems use both packages, some use only ACP and some use only Citrix.



Feature Comparison - ThinManager 3.1 and Presentation Manager 4.5

This article covers the most common features found in the Thin Client management software packages from ACP (ThinManager) and Citrix (Presentation Manager, previously called MetaFrame).

The three biggest differences between ThinManager and Presentation Manager are:

1 - ThinManager manages the Thin Client network, the Thin Clients themselves and the Windows Server configurations. This allows configuration of the video resolution, initial applications, IP addresses, Terminal Server grouping and load balancing, Windows User Preferences and more all from the ThinManager interface. Presentation Manager relies on the management software provided by Microsoft and various Thin Client companies so the end user must learn multiple software packages just to configure the system.

2 - ThinManager is available in Enterprise versions that allow an unlimited number of Thin Clients to connect (even across multiple locations) for a single fixed price. Citrix customers pay per connection.

3 - Clients running under Presentation Manager will have a local operating system (usually Windows CE or Embedded XP) with a local user interface. ThinManager Ready Thin Clients boot faster and are more secure because they receive their OS over the network. This network boot also extends the life of the clients and gives customers the assurance that all ThinManager Ready Thin Clients have the same OS regardless of the hardware manufacturer.

Feature Comparisons - Features in common

Application Publishing - Allows end users to start a particular application based on the application name instead of having to log into the correct Terminal Server and then locate the application. The user can have a number of these accessible from his Thin Client, each one running on a different Terminal Server. Citrix calls this "Published Applications"; ACP calls it "Applink".

Application Load Balancing - A Terminal Server can only host so many Thin Clients before performance begins to suffer. Load Balancing spreads the load among the available servers. Citrix calls this simply "Load Balancing"; ACP calls it "Smart Session". While available on every ThinManager license it is only available on the top levels of Presentation Manager. Presentation Manager also requires Citrix software to be installed on each Terminal Server that will be added to the pool of available servers, and that users have the Enterprise level of Windows 2003 Server. ThinManager does not require any special software to be installed on the servers and can utilize servers with any Windows Terminal Server OS.

Connect to a Single Application - Rather than logging into a particular Terminal Server and displaying a full Windows desktop on the Thin Client, both ThinManager and Presentation Manager allow the Thin Client to log onto a particular server and run only one of the applications installed on that server.

Shadowing - Both programs allow authorized administrators to view the Thin Client screen from a remote location. However Presentation Manager can only shadow a session so if a particular Thin Client is not running a session it cannot be viewed. ThinManager actually shadows the Thin Client's complete desktop so the administrator sees exactly what the user sees.

Server Groups - Allows administrators to create server groups based on different categories, such as operating system, application software, geographic location, department or other user-defined criteria so administrators can precisely target application delivery to the correct servers.

Local com port access - Applications can read from and write to com ports local to the Thin Clients as if they were local to the application.

Windows based client - Both programs can manage a Terminal Session running on a standard Windows PC, eliminating the need for a Thin Client hardware device. This can be useful for desktops that need to run selected applications from the Terminal Servers or for customers who want to reuse older computers.

Local storage on Thin Clients - The applications running on the Terminal Servers can access local disk drives (for Windows based clients) and USB storage devices on the clients.

Session Reconnection - If the client loses contact with the Terminal Server, both products can keep the session open for an easy reconnection once the network becomes available again.

Multi-Monitor Support for spanning the same session across monitors - While both Citrix and ACP support multiple monitors on a single Thin Client, Citrix only allows application spanning (the same program to be shown across multiple monitors). ThinManager also allows a different session to be shown on each monitor.

Session Following - Users can log into a Thin Client at any location and have access to any of their sessions. Citrix calls this *SmoothRoaming* and is limited to the single session that Citrix supports. When a ThinManager user connects through a different client all of his sessions are available.

Smart Card Support - Citrix and ACP both allow user identification via smart card technology, and both can bring the user's existing sessions (or a single session, in the case of Citrix) to the client once he has successfully logged in.

Features exclusive to ThinManager

Instant Failover - ThinManager Ready Thin Clients can connect to two different Terminal Servers at the same time, displaying one session and keeping the other one active in the background. If the client detects a problem with the primary session it will immediately switch to display the background session. The user can also toggle between these two sessions with a hot key.

Multi-Session - All Thin Clients running under ThinManager can simultaneously run sessions on any number of Terminal Servers. These are all accessible by either a key sequence or a drop down menu selection.

Multiple Monitors displaying different sessions - ThinManager allows up to five monitors on a single Thin Client with each monitor displaying a different session. ACP also allows a combination of spanned monitors and monitors displaying different sessions on the same client.

Smart Session Queuing - ACP's Smart Session offers another benefit - Queuing - that eliminates the burden placed on servers when a large number of Thin Clients connect and start a session at the same time. Typically after a system wide event (power failure, for instance) the servers are overwhelmed by the calls for service from all the clients at once. Smart Session Queuing connects the clients in an orderly fashion which results in a faster overall start-up time.

E-mail Event Notification - Multiple levels of events can trigger local messages at a designated operator's console and/or an e-mail message. These messages can be generated by events at the client or the server.

Automatic Thin Client configuration - Under ThinManager, Thin Clients are truly "plug and play". When any ThinManager Ready Thin Client boots, ThinManager will identify the particular model and send the appropriate configuration and drivers to the device, including touch screen support and com port configuration and the current local OS version. This ensures that a client purchased as a backup can be taken off the shelf several years later and still work like the current clients. ThinManager also allows replacement Thin Clients to simply assume a session of a failed client even if the client is a different hardware model. This allows swap-outs without any IT department intervention.

No ACP software needed on any Terminal Server - Unlike Citrix, which requires software to be installed on any Terminal Server that will be used to host Thin Clients, Servers can be added to a system running with ThinManager by simply identifying the new PC. This way you can add and remove Servers as needed without having to change the Server's Operating System - a big advantage for companies who tightly control the OS build of each machine.

Network Boot - Each ThinManager Ready Thin Client receives its local OS each time it boots. Not only does this result in a quicker boot than clients with an embedded OS but also ensures that each client is always running the same version of software.

Dual Ethernet - ThinManager Ready Thin Clients that have two Ethernet ports can connect to two different servers at the same time drastically decreases the chances that a network problem could isolate the client.

Share Keyboard and Mouse - ThinManager allows a single keyboard and mouse to be shared among as many as 5 Thin Clients. The user is then able to slide the mouse off the screen of one client and have it move onto the screen of another, saving desk space.

Touch Screen Modules - Because ACP controls the clients, we have the ability to load drivers for specific Thin Client hardware, such as almost every model of touch screen.

Local Screen Savers display different sessions - A ThinManager Ready Thin Client can be set up to page through all of the running sessions when it is idle.

Shadowing Thin Client hardware, not just sessions - ThinManager administrators can remotely view a client's screen from the moment it boots, not just after it has established a session on a Terminal Server. This feature is vital when diagnosing connection or server problems remotely.