A Federal Power Administration Gains Operational Efficiency, Organizational Transformation

Because of Desktop Deployment Planning Services, we were able to collaborate closely with the customer to identify specific areas of pain. Utilizing the DDPS program, we showcased our own knowledge while focusing on their specific problems. Working one-on-one with the customer through DDPS built confidence both in Planet Technologies as a partner and in Microsoft’s deployment approach. This has already led to new “add-on” business with this customer for Planet Technologies.”

Steve Winter, Vice President, Planet Technologies

Microsoft® Desktop Deployment Planning Services (DDPS) provided Planet Technologies with the engagement, the process, and the incentive to capture a customer opportunity previously unavailable to it. Through DDPS, Planet Technologies was able to demonstrate its skills and experience. The company built customer confidence and established credibility that placed it in a trusted advisor role that ultimately brought in new business.

“Working with the Microsoft account team toward common goals, we were able to minimize the risk to the customer through DDPS, opening the opportunity to get their real issues and challenges on the table.”

Andy Norris, Vice President, Planet Technologies

Overview

Partner: Planet Technologies
Country or Region: United States
Industry: Federal / Energy

Customer Profile
Federal Power Administration markets wholesale electricity and transmission to public and private utilities, and some large industries.

Business Situation
This agency location needed a way to provision, install and deploy full operating system software. The agency was concerned how it would support its user base in transitioning to laptops and a mobile user base.

Solution
With Planet Technologies’ assistance, the agency availed itself of Microsoft® Desktop Deployment Planning Services.

Benefits
- Can standardize
- Saves administrator time
- Can deploy standardized images
- Can manage remote laptop users
- Can transition from static desktop to a mobile workforce
Planet Technologies’ partnership approach proved key in assisting a recent customer.

Step 1: Planet Technologies became a Microsoft® Desktop Deployment Planning Services (DDPS) Partner.
Step 2: Then the company identified that its customer had Software Assurance Benefits and needed deployment help.
Step 3: Planet Technologies met with key customer technical team members via a DDPS engagement to review the Microsoft Solution Accelerator for Business Desktop Deployment (BDD) and benefits.
Step 4: Together with key customer technical team members, they performed discovery—of the client’s current process, issues and pain points associated with Microsoft Systems Management Server (SMS) deployment and desktop deployment process.
Step 5: The customer began their pilot deployment of the BDD solution.

Situation

Planet Technologies had already established a strong relationship with the customer’s Microsoft Account Executive, but had only been engaging in mid-level conversations with the customer’s decision makers at a very introductory level. The Microsoft® Desktop Deployment Planning Services (DDPS) process initially began with a series of conference calls between Planet Technologies and the customer’s key decision makers. The discussion centered on desktop deployment. DDPS was mentioned as a possible solution to mitigate some of the risk, and get beyond preliminary high-level discussions. During these calls, Planet Technologies was able to demonstrate its knowledge of Microsoft technologies and processes, such as Systems Management Server (SMS), Microsoft Solution Accelerator for Business Desktop Deployment (BDD), and User State Migration Toolkit (USMT). Planet Technologies was also able to leverage other experiences in desktop deployments in the public sector, past tools that may have been used, and previous versions of some of those tools and utilities.

“We were able to discuss critical components of deployment with the customer, including change management, customer communications, scheduling, and testing methodologies.”

Steve Winter, Vice President, Planet Technologies

Gaining Customer Confidence and Commitment

The customer initially had reservations about the DDPS program. They worried about additional complexity to an already challenging deployment. However Planet Technologies was able to show how DDPS would benefit them, how it would eliminate risk, and how it could help them move toward a more viable plan. “We worked extensively with one another, using our knowledge and our experience to help convince the customer this would be a valuable, low-risk activity to undertake,” says Steve Winter, Vice President at Planet Technologies.

The expertise that Planet Technologies brought to the table under the framework of the DDPS program established customer confidence. The next step was to provide Planet’s customer with in-depth information about the DDPS program and answer the following questions:

- What is the program about?
- What would they receive from participating?
- What resourcing would they need to provide?
- Would this be a pilot deployment or a lab deployment?
- How much flexibility is available in the program?

At the time of the discussions, Planet’s customer was supporting over 4,000 users on a predominantly desktop-based Windows® XP Service Pack 1 (SP1), or above environment. A little over half currently were supporting SMS agents, and some might have still been running Windows 2000. The customer was running multiple versions of Microsoft Office.
The cost of patch management and the lack of control over their environment was a key driver to engage. In addition, the customer was seeing a steady move from a static desktop-located user base to an increasing number of mobile users supported by laptops. This switch presented two significant challenges. First, the current method of operating system (OS) provisioning, installation, and deployment of software at both the patch and application level was manual or script-driven, and this approach had lead to a disparate and unwieldy number of differing configurations and images across the organization. Second, any solution also had to take into account the changes in the common user profile, from static to mobile.

The customer’s primary pain points included:

- No version control and limited knowledge of who was using what versions of Microsoft Office and other applications
- Manual monitoring of licenses, and difficulty in keeping current
- Limited process for updating and patching
- Manual handling of versions

The customer wanted to get a baseline of what they had, bring it all into a standard configuration, and then to be able to actively manage their desktops and laptop environments as they move forward. Microsoft and Planet Technologies deemed them a good candidate for DDPS.

Solution

Once onsite, the customer assigned a dedicated resource to work with a Planet Technologies consultant extremely skilled in desktop deployments and SMS. The consultant worked side-by-side with the customer resource. Together, they got a clear overview of not only of the BDD and what that solution could do for them, but also of some of the issues involving the customer’s existing SMS implementation. As described by the consultant:

“During this period of collaborating closely with the customer resource, we were able to highlight some specific areas of pain and identify how the solution was going to be able to address them. By fully using the DDPS program materials and our own knowledge, and by working one-on-one with the customer, we were able to build confidence, both in Planet Technologies as a partner and in the DDPS program itself.”

The customer’s desktop deployment process was characterized by some specific difficulties:

- A three-disk DVD installation process
- Manual launching of scripts
- No existing standard desktop or laptop configurations or images
- Most applications were built into the image

Planet Technologies explained the resulting improvements the customer could expect from BDD:

- Standardization
- Hands-off post-OS implementation
- Zero-touch processes, rebuilds, and system refreshes
- A managed one-image approach

Potential roadblocks were also identified through ongoing work with the customer’s dedicated resource person:

- Length of time to deploy the SMS image
- Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) already connecting remote users to the network
- Security concerns based on inaccurate information

Moving Forward to Pilot

Once Planet’s customer had gained a clear understanding of the best practices and management process behind the BDD approach, they decided they wanted to move quickly into the pilot phase.

With a pilot deployment of the BDD extension pack in production use, the customer was able roll out SMS to their entire user-base. Then, they could accurately inventory the applications, OSs and patch levels of all machines and implement a process of configuring and implementing image standardization across the organization.

As a result of the DDPS engagement, Planet Technologies was able to help the customer understand where they are in their infrastructure maturity model. While the technology is definitely worthwhile, it can be daunting for a customer to consider significant change. That is where an experienced partner, like Planet Technologies, can make all the difference—and did in this engagement.
What is expected to be presented in the completed DDPS roadmap is a series of recommendations to address the customer’s current SMS deployment and their network in order to facilitate better deployment and management of their Microsoft Office products.

In this particular case, the customer environment consisted of various versions of Microsoft Office, no version control, and painful and expensive patch management—all associated pain points of a basic infrastructure. The challenges of their 10 Megabit infrastructure have complicated this further, but getting to a Modern Office has been a powerful motivator to move forward.

**Resulting New Business**

At the same time, while the desktop group within the customer moved forward with the pilot, another group was doing a service-oriented architecture project based on Microsoft tools. They determined that they wanted a partner to provide Independent Verification & Validation (IV&V) services, and part of that process involved strong Microsoft Operations Manager (MOM) skill sets.

Explaining what subsequently happened, Steve Winter, Vice President at Planet Technology, relates, “We were recommended by the group managing desktop deployment to the group looking for IV&V as a reliable partner. This recommendation was a result of their positive experience with us through DDPS and our knowledge of management tools like SMS and MOM. We were one of the few partners to receive the RFP [Request for Proposal], and we went on to win it.”

“By going through training, increasing our knowledge of processes and tools, and becoming a Microsoft DDPS Partner, we have been able to engage with our customer at a higher business decision-making level and accelerate the sales cycle. We’ve been able to showcase our value, both from a technology and a process standpoint and, thereby, become a trusted resource to our customer.”

The desktop group’s recommendation allowed Planet Technologies to win a project in another part of the organization, providing important contacts and the chance for the company to further expand its service revenue opportunities with the customer.

**Positive Impact and Forward Momentum**

Because of the DDPS engagement, Planet Technologies has become a valued partner, and the customer has gained valuable assistance identifying their real issues and formulating a plan. Consequently, when another job came up with those same requirements, Planet Technologies was on a short list of partners considered for the opportunity. Coupled with the internal recommendation from the desktop group, Planet Technologies was able to easily win the project.

“As a result of the trusted advisor role we’ve gained with the customer during our work with them through the DDPS program, we’ve already won another job with their organization, and are working on one of their most strategic Microsoft development projects. That is what DDPS means to us.” Steve Winter, Vice President, Planet Technologies

For additional information on Microsoft Desktop Deployment Planning Services (DDPS) please visit https://iwsolve.partners.extranet.microsoft.com/ddps/ or contact DDPS@microsoft.com

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