

## UNIDESK CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY



# Society Insurance: Future-Proofing Application & Desktop Management

With operations now in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Tennessee, this Wisconsin-based insurance company needed to make desktops and applications easier to manage for IT and more accessible to remote workers. Unidesk and Citrix XenDesktop are making this possible.



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Shane Guyette  
Director of Information Systems, Society Insurance

### An Insurance Leader is Born

In the summer of 1915, a group of Madison, Wisconsin threshermen decided they'd had enough. After struggling to purchase workers compensation insurance for their employees due to the high risk of injury in their jobs, the thresher crews banded together to form their own insurance company - Wisconsin Brotherhood of Threshermen Company, Limited Mutual. While the name has changed over the years to "Society Insurance", the company's commitment to policyholders has never wavered.

Now 100 years later, Society Insurance helps businesses of all kinds, including restaurants, taverns, bars, hotels, grocery stores, and more, with their insurance needs. The company has expanded from Wisconsin into Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Tennessee, and plans to continue its growth into other U.S. states.

### Business Drivers for Modernizing Desktop and Application Access

Supporting the firm's growth was one of the major catalysts for transitioning the company's end user computing environment to virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI).

Says Shane Guyette, Director of Information Systems at Society Insurance, "To be able to grow and maintain a footprint within each market and each state that we do business in, we had to have a more flexible way for our end users to access the many Windows applications our business relies on."

One of the ways the company has grown quickly is by enabling its remote employees to work from home. While telecommuting is a great way to attract new hires, it also presented IT with the challenge of how to efficiently handle telecommuting operations.

Adds Shane, "We learned from the experience of another Wisconsin-based company that was expanding its operations. They added more PCs because VDI wasn't as mature as it is now. Two years later, their workforce needed mobility, and their millennials were wanting to work remotely from their own devices. They made a huge capital investment in PCs, and nobody wanted to use them. We didn't want a repeat of that situation. With VDI maturing and new application management solutions like Unidesk arriving on the scene, we knew VDI would enable

us to provide an easy-to-manage 'in-office' experience that would allow our employees to work from anywhere."

Break/fix and user support challenges could also be addressed by VDI and Unidesk. Society's aging physical PCs were experiencing an increasing number of hardware and performance issues. The company also permitted workers to personalize their desktops to maximize productivity, which created desktop support issues. Mailing laptops back to headquarters, diagnosing the hardware and software problems, and mailing the laptops back resulted in 2-3 days of downtime.

Explains Shane, "Our goal with VDI was to just ask the employee to take a coffee break, and we'd have them back up and running by the time they're finished."

Lastly, Unidesk would solve the insurance company's application management challenge. Society Insurance has multiple departments, each with unique apps that require a high degree of interoperability and 24x7 availability requirements.

Comments Shane, "We write a lot of our own applications and maintain them ourselves. This ensures that, from an insurer and agent standpoint, it is easier for our policyholders to interact with us. Integration and interoperability are something we pride ourselves on. But we needed a more efficient app management solution to streamline this process as we expanded to new locations."

## Deploying Unidesk and Citrix XenDesktop

The insurance company's IT team began researching application and desktop virtualization technologies and settled on the combination of Citrix XenDesktop and Unidesk.

Says Andrew Gresbach, Desktop Administrator at Society Insurance, "One thing we knew from the beginning was that regardless of which EUC vendor we chose, we wanted Unidesk for application management. We have a lot of homegrown apps and users with unique needs. Each department is different enough that we couldn't have a standard template or silo for each. Every image you create adds overhead and management, so we wanted to avoid image sprawl."

Unidesk application layering technology enables Society Insurance to deliver apps to different users without creating extra images to manage. Every app and the Windows operating system are provisioned and updated once, no matter how many different app combinations are needed.

Explains Andrew, "When we found Unidesk, we knew we had found a way to solve the application and image management challenge with their 'patch once, deploy many' capability. We could scale app delivery as we needed, we could package and deliver any app, and we could use any end user computing platform we wanted because they support them all."

Unidesk simplifies Windows application life cycle management, enhances security, and gives Society Insurance's employees the personalization they were accustomed to with their PCs. With just a few clicks, the IT team can package, update and deliver over 200 apps for any set of virtual machines. Once Unidesk attaches all assigned virtual disk layers to a desktop and merges them together, the apps appear locally installed even though the installation procedure was never run. Unidesk's cross-layer merge capability satisfies the company's need for app interoperability - apps in separate layers work together just as if they were hand-installed on each machine. Unidesk layering also makes rolling back updates and undoing bad patches just as easy as initial app delivery.

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## Business Benefits with Unidesk and Citrix

With Unidesk and Citrix XenDesktop, IT is giving every user persistent desktops that preserve all of their customizations, which has helped smooth the transition from physical PCs.

Day-to-day IT operations like application packaging, Windows patching, app assignment, and break/fix are now handled by the helpdesk, freeing up senior IT staff. The help desk can now spin up a new desktop in less than 15 minutes, making the on-boarding of new corporate-based and remote employees almost instantaneous.

Patches and updates are also much faster. Since there is only one Windows 7 operating system layer to update, there is no need to work on patches on nights and weekends. Windows service packs and hot fixes can be packaged with Unidesk during business hours, tested on a few test VMs, and scheduled for deployment during off-hours. Any unforeseen issues can be immediately resolved by rolling users back to the previous version while the problem is diagnosed.

As expected, the company's telecommuting program is easy to support with the combination of Citrix and Unidesk. Society Insurance can recruit new talent no matter where they are located. With the broad client device support provided by Citrix Receiver, employees can work

from home either with their own equipment or with a company-supplied thin client/monitor setup. The high-performance Citrix HDX protocol provides a PC-like experience even over remote connections.

The employee response to the new Citrix-Unidesk system has been very positive.

Says Shane, "The change from 2-3 days of downtime to resolve a desktop or app issue to 15 minutes is a major improvement. Our end users are thrilled with the performance of desktop and app access and the fact that they still get a personal desktop experience. It's great when a technology project is a win-win for users and IT."

## Current and Future Plans

Society Insurance is now supporting a wide range of devices including home PCs, standard thin clients, dual monitor thin clients and Chromebooks. The company plans to expand Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) support to give employees even more flexibility. With Citrix's enhanced HTML5 capabilities, employees can just use a browser for anywhere, anytime application access from their favorite device.

The insurance company is also planning a Windows 10 migration for 2017. Says Shane, "Now that we have our applications and desktops virtualized with Unidesk and Citrix XenDesktop, we anticipate a pretty easy Windows 10 migration. With Unidesk, we'll just have to package Windows 10 as an OS layer, re-package any apps that need to be updated for Windows 10, assign the layers, and reboot the VMs. It'll be a pretty easy transition."

## DEPLOYMENT DETAILS

Application Management

Unidesk

End User Computing

Citrix XenDesktop

Server

HP

Storage

NetApp

Users

350

Application Layers

200