

Leading Commercial Mortgage Financial Solutions Provider Reduces Costs, Expands Application Access with Windows .NET Terminal Services



Solution Overview

Customer Profile

GMAC Commercial Mortgage, the largest commercial mortgage financial solutions provider in the United States, has a loan-servicing portfolio of more than U.S.\$150 billion for projects ranging from multifamily residential construction to health care, hospitality, and e-commerce.

Business Situation

GMAC Commercial Mortgage needed a way for users at subsidiaries and remote branches to access line-of-business applications in an efficient and cost-effective manner, whatever their connectivity options.

Solution

The company deployed key applications in a terminal server model based on Microsoft® Windows® .NET Terminal Services.

Benefits

- Reduced connection, support, and deployment costs
- Easier access to applications and data
- Flexible and secure access for users at remote branches, home, and on the road

Software and Services

Microsoft Windows XP Professional
Microsoft Windows 2000 Professional
Microsoft Windows 9x
Microsoft Windows .NET Terminal Services
Microsoft Consulting Services

Hardware

Seven Compaq terminal servers load-balanced with seven equivalent backup servers
3,000 client machines: 70 percent Hewlett-Packard and Compaq desktops; 30 percent IBM ThinkPad and Compaq laptops

By making business-critical applications available to users through an implementation of Microsoft® Windows® .NET Terminal Services, GMAC Commercial Mortgage Corporation is reducing support, administration, and software licensing costs. The company also is delivering key application data to users in one-third the time, eliminating the time and cost of client deployments for some applications, and offering users an easy-to-deploy solution for rapid and secure access to vital corporate data.

Situation

GMAC Commercial Mortgage Corporation (GMACCM) is the very definition of a dynamic company. Since its first year of operation in 1994, the Pennsylvania-based subsidiary of GMAC Commercial Holding Corp., which has established more than 100 offices worldwide, has expanded its loan-servicing portfolio 30-fold and is one of the largest commercial mortgage financial solutions providers in the United States. Today, GMACCM's loan-servicing portfolio exceeds U.S.\$154 billion and includes mortgages on commercial real estate projects ranging from the construction of multifamily properties to health care facilities, hospitality properties, and equipment and franchises. Maintaining its momentum in growth and leadership is an ever-growing challenge for GMACCM information technology (IT) executives who need to provide applications in a timely and cost-effective manner, in a wide spectrum of computing environments and connection technologies, and in a form that is easily accessible to all employees.

For example, consider Strategy CS, an application that was developed by another GMAC Commercial Holding Corp. subsidiary to provide a Microsoft® Windows®-based user interface into an AS/400-based mortgage-processing system. In the past, it was difficult to deliver the application to up to 1,500 users across the company in a clean, efficient manner. Typically, users accessed the application over dial-up connections that might be as slow as 56 Kbps and thus prone to frequent timeouts. Because each access involved a highly configured library session, reestablishing a connection that had timed out also required reconfiguring the library session—typically a 10-minute call to the help desk.

Another application that was difficult for employees to use efficiently was PeopleSoft. Because of dial-up delays in accessing the application over the company's wide area network (WAN), many users filled out human resources-related forms by hand and mailed them to the central office

where the data was entered into the system—also by hand. Web access was not an option because a central component of the application had no Web functionality. Nor was distributed deployment an option, because the application's 66-GB database had to be stored centrally for management reasons. "Users routinely waited up to two minutes to download a given document image," says Alicia Italia, project manager, Information Technology. "Clearly, we needed a way for them to view the image without having to download its content to their local drive."

On a project-by-project basis, Italia and her IT colleagues implemented a strategy to do this using Windows 2000 Terminal Services. But they soon realized they needed more. "To implement a terminal-based approach for these applications to some 3,000 users worldwide, we needed a product incorporating the functionality of both Windows 2000 Terminal Services and the third-party product," she says. "That's when we began looking seriously at a Windows .NET Terminal Services implementation."

Solution

For Italia and her team, the major selling point for Microsoft Windows .NET Terminal Services was its drive- and printer-redirection capability. "With drive and printer redirection, users could enjoy the performance advantages of a terminal-based approach with the administrative advantages of a network-based approach," she explains. "In other words, for 90 percent of their work they could quickly and easily access screen images, avoiding the delays and timeouts of pulling content over a poor connection. And for the 10 percent of their work for which they needed to store or print content on a local drive or printer, they could do that, too."

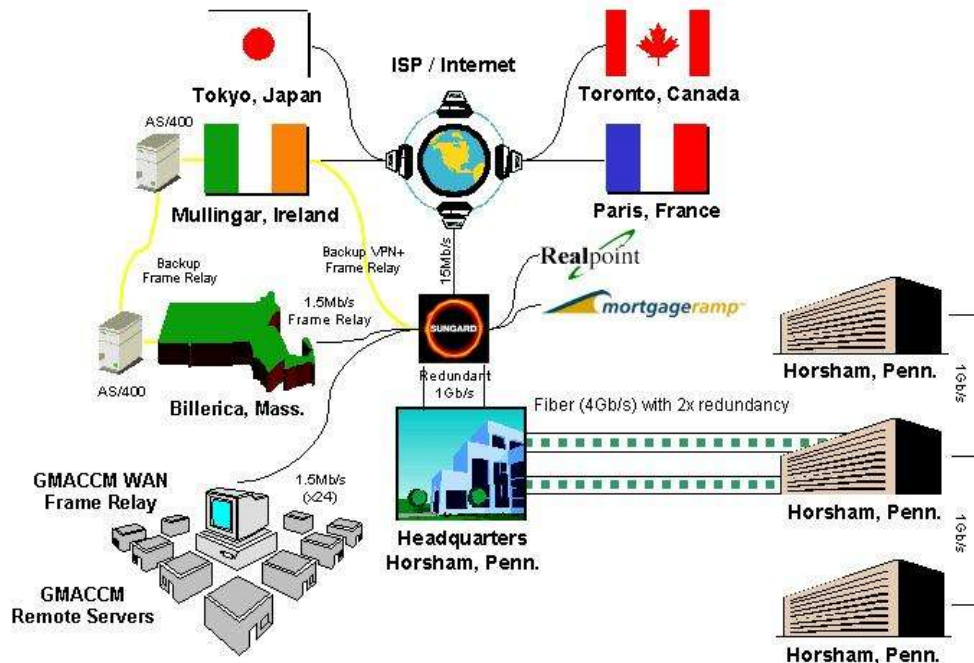
Another feature that Italia and her team liked about Windows .NET Terminal Services was its ease of deployment into a Windows XP-based client environment. "With Windows XP on the desktop, users simply download and launch a small configuration-setting file, and in seconds they are ready to open a Windows .NET Terminal Services session," says Italia.

With the help of Microsoft Consulting Services, GMACCM is implementing Windows .NET Terminal Services as part of a Joint Development Program (JDP) to evaluate the Windows .NET Server family. The JDP team is deploying Windows .NET Terminal Services, along with the Strategy CS and PeopleSoft applications, in a server farm consisting of seven terminal servers at the company's main facility load balanced with seven equivalent servers at a second facility.

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Alicia Italia
Project Manager
Information Technology
GMAC Commercial Mortgage

GMAC Commercial Mortgage Network Infrastructure



“For the part of our user base that was running Strategy CS on the client side, our twice-yearly upgrades were a significant investment in time and money—requiring installation, testing, and troubleshooting on some 800 machines. By installing exclusively on the terminal servers, we anticipate saving roughly \$50,000 per year in support costs.”

Andrew Farkas
Assistant Vice President
Information Technology
GMAC Commercial Mortgage

GMACCM implemented Windows .NET Terminal Services in a worldwide network infrastructure based on both Microsoft Windows 2000 Server and Windows NT® Server.

Benefits

Reduced Costs All Around

For Italia and her colleagues, the primary advantage of Microsoft Windows .NET Terminal Services is its ability to provide efficient application access to remote offices and subsidiaries that do not enjoy a high-speed, direct connection into the GMACCM WAN. The related cost savings represent a major benefit. “Windows .NET Terminal Services enables employees, wherever they are based, to execute a secure connection without our needing to provide T-1 or other costly connection technologies,” says Andrew Farkas, assistant vice president, Information Technology. Another cost advantage of running key applications in a terminal-server environment comes in the area of deployment. “For the part of our user base that was running Strategy CS on the client side, our twice-yearly upgrades were a significant investment in time and money—requiring installation, testing, and troubleshooting on some 800 machines,” Farkas explains. “By installing exclusively on the terminal servers (>24), we anticipate saving roughly \$50,000 per year in support costs.”

Also for helping to keep administrative costs in line, GMACCM is using the Windows .NET Terminal Services Session Directory and expanded Group Policy object (GPO) settings. With the Session Directory, Italia and her colleagues can ensure that after an inadvertent network disconnection users are automatically reconnected to the same terminal-server session they were working in before the disconnection. With expanded GPO settings, administrators can lock down a given terminal-server configuration so that when it is time to install a new server the settings can be automatically downloaded to it. “This not only frees installers from having to touch every

machine, but also helps the network operations group to know that all terminal servers are configured consistently,” Farkas says.

Greater User Productivity

As for the PeopleSoft application, the easy and efficient accessibility provided by Windows .NET Terminal Services is enabling many employees to forgo the time-consuming process of submitting paper-based forms for everything from expense reports to benefits upgrades. In addition, more users will be able to access the application. “By making PeopleSoft available on a terminal server, a broader spectrum of employees can have easy access to it,” Italia points out. “This enables us to leverage our investment in this essential application.”

For Italia, “easy access” translates into a very clear productivity message. “According to what users are reporting even early in the Windows .NET Terminal Services deployment, the time to access a typical document image is around 30 to 45 seconds,” she says. “This is a far cry from the two minutes that users had to wait in the past.”

Playing a Role in the Company’s Success

Finally, there is the Windows .NET Terminal Services capability that so impressed Italia, Farkas, and their colleagues: drive and printer redirection, which is proving itself by enabling users to save selected files to a local client machine or print them while accessing the application from their home or hotel. With drive redirection, a user can easily select a file for downloading to his or her hard disk and route it locally for review or approvals. With printer redirection, users are free to make hard copies of selected files when they are accessing the system from home or while traveling.

This last point is particularly important since travel plays an extensive role in the day-to-day business of commercial mortgage lending. As Italia says. “To enable employees the same ease of accessing vital applications and data from wherever they are is an essential part of our growth and success.”

For more information about Microsoft Windows .NET Terminal Services, go to:
<http://www.microsoft.com/net/products/servers.asp>

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:
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For more information about GMAC Commercial Mortgage Corporation products and services, visit the Web site at: <http://www.gmaccm.com/>

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