

# Citadines serviced residences

## Case Study

**An international group of serviced residences has benefited from the replacement of its IT equipment allowing the migration to a zero-client desktop streaming infrastructure.**

**Today, Citadines serviced residences uses zero client desktop devices together with Wyse WSM to provide a streaming infrastructure that allows a centralised IT team of only 5 people to remotely manage over 300 users.**

The Ascott International group, a market leader for serviced residences, unites the brands Ascott, Somerset and Citadines with over 19,000 apartments located in the major cities of Europe, Asia-Pacific and the Gulf region. Under its Citadines brand, Ascott has a presence in France, Germany, Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom with a total of 44 sites connected to the headquarters in Levallois Perret (on the outskirts of Paris) via VPN using SDSL to provide bandwidths ranging from 512 kbps to 4 Mbps.

### IT equipment at the end of its service life

In total, the IT equipment in the Citadines serviced residences comprises 300 desktop PCs and 100 laptops as well as at least one server per site accommodating the management databases for reservations, rooms and billing (PMS, Property Management System).

The data from each site is consolidated at regular intervals with the headquarters, which also houses the company's call centre which utilises approximately twenty servers.

In 2007, all workstations in the Citadines serviced residences, most dating from 1999, were reaching the end of their service life. At the time of replacing the IT equipment, the group's IT managers decided to evaluate the possibility of using a thin computing infrastructure.



### In summary

‘Our team of 5 people manages the IT equipment for 44 serviced residences located in 5 European countries, which is the equivalent of more than 300 computers. After having used PCs for a long time, we decided to opt for a Wyse zero client desktop streaming architecture, which provides the user with the same level of convenience as a PC while allowing us to simplify our support considerably.’

JORIS LE BLANSCH  
IT SUPPORT DIRECTOR  
FOR EUROPE  
ASCOTT INTERNATIONAL





## Computing Power

‘By relying on the workstation for all the computing power required to carry out tasks, the infrastructure of a zero client desktop streaming architecture that we chose can operate with less powerful servers than a traditional thin client solution.’

JORIS LE BLANSCH  
IT SUPPORT DIRECTOR  
FOR EUROPE  
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## Moving towards a thin computing infrastructure

Joris Le Blansch, IT Support Director for Europe explains: “Very soon we decided to switch to thin clients. Although the initial purchase price of a thin client is very similar to a PC, in terms of the TCO, PC’s prove to be much more expensive. In fact, we have a very small IT team (5 people) based in Levallois and no on-site technicians. We could always resolve 90% of our PC problems by using remote access. But a more serious hardware problem for example, normally results in downtime and significant repair costs. There are certainly not as many problems with using thin client devices.”

Since 2007, the company has therefore been replacing its servers with a view to switching to a thin computing architecture in which all of its 300 desktop PCs would be replaced by thin client devices. The company chose IBM X3650 servers with dual Xeon 2 GHz processors, 2 GB of RAM and SAS 15000 rpm hard drives in a RAID 5 array.

In terms of thin computing, the company was faced with two technological choices: a traditional Citrix / Windows Terminal Services access infrastructure solution or a desktop streaming solution. Joris Le Blansch notes: “With an access infrastructure solution, we would not have had any particular problems with local device management, but we would have had to install a new server on every site. Centralising the servers in the headquarters was unimaginable: if the network connection was lost, site activity would come to a standstill. In addition, if we installed the access infrastructure server software on the same server as our PMS tool, performance would have been inadequate. Finally, the access infrastructure solutions that we evaluated were not satisfactory in terms of user licensing costs.”

## Desktop streaming, a more efficient solution

The company therefore quickly evaluated desktop streaming and discovered the local server did not need to be particularly powerful because the way that the workstations provide the bulk of the necessary computing power. Two thin client suppliers were assessed.

“The first supplier only offered one model, with the thin client integrated in a screen. Wyse, however, offered a thin client that was separate from the screen: we chose this solution, which allows us to use different screens depending on the workstations and to have absolute flexibility in terms of positioning the central unit. We also preferred the Wyse WSM software. This OS and application streaming solution allows items used on the workstation to be sent on demand. It is easier to deploy and manage on a day-to-day basis than another suppliers’ solution, especially since it is not protocol dependant and is therefore more flexible than other solutions,” recalls Joris Le Blansch.



## Deployment

‘We decided to deploy just a single image for all of our 300 workstations. We had to incorporate all the constraints and needs of the users, but in return, we save time and simplify administration.’

JORIS LE BLANSCH  
IT SUPPORT DIRECTOR  
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## Thin clients to replace almost all PCs

The thin clients chosen by the IT department were the Wyse VOOL zero clients with 1 GB RAM. They have replaced all the group's PCs except for a few located in the financial and accounting departments in the headquarters:

*“Those few stations for which we kept the PCs are using specialised applications. They would certainly have been able to run on a zero client, but we would have had to create specific image for each one, which we did not want to do,”* explains Joris Le Blansch.

Wyse WSM is very cost-efficient, has been installed on the servers on each site, along with the PMS software: *“Hence we are not constrained by bandwidth or line availability,”* he emphasises. A unique workstation image has been created, 10 GB in size. It is stored on each server while a master image is maintained by the IT department in Levallois-Perret. In case of any modifications, a delta file is created and then sent to each site by FTP.

Joris Le Blansch went on to explain that: *“We encountered only one problem: our serviced residences use 4 different magnetic key coding systems. Hence we had to install in the image the appropriate software for each system within the workstation. Eventually, the 4 systems will be unified, but it will be a costly process because we will have to change all locks to all serviced residences.”*

## Users are delighted with their new workstations

*“For our users, this migration has been a real leap forward in terms of speed and convenience, especially with respect to noise levels compared with the old PCs which had become extremely noisy: the thin clients do not require fans. Hence they are, and will always remain, perfectly silent,”* boasts Joris Le Blansch.

The fact that some PCs have been replaced by thin clients does not make the slightest difference for them: *“We have always restricted our users from internet access and have never allowed the local installation of applications for a long time. So, from that point of view, the zero clients do not make the slightest difference for the users on a day-to-day basis.”*

If, despite everything, they manage to install something, the streaming management tool, used in volatile mode, will remove any modifications not specified by the administrator at the next reboot.

## Simplified IT support and management

On a day-to-day basis, IT support has been simplified: the teams in Levallois can always take remote control of a user's workstation, but no longer need to worry about knowing the configuration of the machine being used.

In the event of a hardware problem arising, a new clean thin client is sent to the site on next-day delivery, which simplifies problems relating to holding repair stock and monitoring workstations within the IT inventory.



## Efficiency

‘Thanks to our new infrastructure, we no longer need to worry about knowing the hardware configuration of the workstation being used by the user calling us. This allows us to respond remotely to the user’s problems more quickly and more efficiently.’

**JORIS LE BLANSCH**  
IT SUPPORT DIRECTOR  
FOR EUROPE  
ASCOTT INTERNATIONAL



## Conclusion

The Citadines serviced residences are now equipped with 300 zero clients distributed across their 44 European sites. The IT teams responsible for managing this IT equipment, which is distributed across 5 European countries, comprises of just 5 people. A unique disk image of 10 GB has been established for all users, which they cannot modify locally and which is automatically updated by FTP. Should a serious problem arise, a new ready-to-use workstation can be delivered within 24 hours, which ensures an optimal quality of service with minimized costs.

**Wyse Technology Inc.**  
3471 North First Street  
San Jose  
CA 95134-1801

**Visit our website at:**  
<http://www.wyse.com>  
Or send email to:  
[sales@wyse.com](mailto:sales@wyse.com)

**Wyse Sales**  
800 GET WYSE  
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**Wyse Customer  
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800 800 WYSE  
(800 800 9973)

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