Six Steps to Continuous Application Readiness

A holistic, automated approach to cut the cost and complexity of Windows 7 migrations, application virtualization and routine application deployments
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Introduction
Most organizations are looking to move to the Windows® 7 platform, driven by the impending end of support for Windows XP, along with compelling business reasons based on the functionality that the new operating system provides. Additionally, many organizations are looking to simultaneously deploy the latest virtualization technologies, such as application virtualization, to simplify application management and reduce costs.

Despite the business benefits of migrating to Windows 7 or implementing application virtualization, these transitions can be taxing on everyone. For IT, they create extra work, longer hours, and higher stress. For employees, customers, and partners, they can disrupt access to vital applications and services. For management, they often spell budget overruns and end-user complaints. For the enterprise as a whole, they can delay new strategic initiatives aimed at creating competitive advantages.

Why are so many organizations still held hostage by technology transitions? Because even though software deployments and OS migrations are among the riskiest functions of IT, and the list of application preparation requirements continues to grow: application discovery, cataloging, compatibility testing, remediation and conversion, packaging, virtualization, etc; most organizations do not have a continuous process for preparing and deploying applications in a reliable, consistent way. Technology transitions are approached as a point-in-time project.

What’s needed is an efficient way to automate technology transitions—a process that not only gets you through today’s migration smoothly but also prepares you for the next. This is continuous application readiness.

That means every transition, whether it’s the OS, a mission-critical application, or a data center consolidation, should be undertaken with the future in mind. In other words, “application readiness” is really about change readiness. The ultimate objective is to build a future-proof environment that adapts to both fast-changing technologies and ever-changing business requirements with equal ease.

And that means application readiness should be approached as a continuous process. It should implement best practices and technologies to ensure consistency and optimal operations; it should leverage existing investments, such as packaging technology, wherever possible; it should automate each phase of the process; and it should standardize practices and procedures so that deployments are reliable and repeatable.

With those overarching goals in mind, it becomes possible to move from a reactive, project-oriented approach to a proactive, holistic approach to continuous application readiness.

Figure 1: A high-level view of the six steps to continuous application readiness
Today, the critical need for application readiness is underscored by projects such as Windows 7 migrations and application virtualization. However, with most organizations updating, repackaging and deploying over 30% of their applications annually due to new versions, upgrades and patches, the requirement extends beyond the initial migration project into a need for business as usual application management.

This paper outlines the six key steps of a migration project, illustrates the major tasks within each phase, and explains how the Flexera Software™ solution can reduce the risk and cost of your application deployments by providing a consistent approach to continuous application readiness.

6 Steps to Continuous Application Readiness

Step 1: Identify What’s Being Used (and What Isn’t)
The first step requires obtaining an accurate view of the applications that are deployed across the organization. This is a good time to look at the application inventory and take stock of what is actually being used, as opposed to what is deployed. Depending on the end users’ abilities to install applications locally, there may be applications that cannot be centrally monitored or managed, but could be crucial to the business and therefore must be identified.

Beyond identifying application installation, analyzing application usage provides a deeper level of insight as to which applications are actually used. It is critical to know what is being used and, more importantly, which applications are not being used.

The Flexera Software solution integrates with industry-leading systems management technology such as Microsoft® System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) to extract both application and hardware information as a baseline for continuous application readiness.

From a software perspective, it can extract the full titles of applications, the application’s producer, version information, and application usage details from SCCM to get an enterprise view of application consumption. The inventory data from SCCM can then be exported for analysis.

Step 2: Rationalize Applications to Cut Migration Costs
Operating system upgrades present a prime opportunity to rationalize the application estate and to address desktop application sprawl. With a clear view of both the deployed and used applications, you can verify the need to continue to support the applications or to consolidate applications to a reduced number of products and versions.

With the Flexera Software continuous application readiness approach, once the application inventory has been imported and catalogued, applications can be classified and sorted by type, so that duplicate versions and multiple vendors within each type can be identified and consolidated. The result is a list of the applications that will actually need to be moved to Windows 7—and significant cost savings for each application that does not need to be migrated (or supported in the future).

Based on Flexera Software engagements, estimates are that for each application removed from a migration project, savings can be between $3000 and $5000.

This application consolidation process then becomes a key element of continuous application readiness. It is undertaken not as a point-in-time activity, but as part of a regularly scheduled, ongoing process.

Step 3: Assess Compatibility So You Know What to Migrate and/or Virtualize
Typically only 30 – 50% of applications that run on Windows XP will run on Windows 7 without requiring some modification. This makes it all the more important to perform application compatibility testing before upgrading. Doing so, will identify those applications that need to be fixed in order to run on Windows 7 and those with un-fixable compatibility issues that will need to be replaced or updated.

It’s difficult to know which applications will have compatibility issues, and thus which will require remediation to work on Windows 7. A manual approach of installing and testing each application on Windows 7 is extremely time consuming, and also it’s difficult to exhaustively test all features of the application to ensure they work. Many applications may initially appear to work— but over time, as features and functions in the application are used, compatibility issues may arise. This can cause unpredictable application performance and crashes in the production environment.

In addition to assessing application compatibility with Windows 7, organizations that are implementing application virtualization should also check for application suitability for their chosen virtualization technology as not all applications can be converted to run as virtual applications.

The Flexera Software solution provides a highly effective method to quickly identify applications that have compatibility issues, and provides detailed information on the location, and specifics of the issue. The solution is fully automated, able to assess hundreds or thousands of applications and gives a view of the overall application compatibility across the application estate for both 32-bit and 64-bit versions of Windows 7, as well as suitability testing for application virtualization if required.

The solution categorizes each application as “Red,” “Amber,” or “Green,” with Red being incompatible, Amber signifying fixable issues, and Green being ready to deploy. This automated approach saves significant time compared with manual tools and clearly shows where remediation efforts need to be focused.
Step 4: Plan Migration Projects
Many organizations are challenged with not having adequate information to scope and budget for a Windows 7 migration project. Since application compatibility is one of the most costly and time-consuming components of a migration, having an accurate view of the applications to be migrated, and their readiness for Windows 7, provides the information required to accurately budget and resource a migration project.

The work completed in the Rationalize and Assess Compatibility phases arms you with a list of rationalized applications and the details of compatibility issues that need to be addressed. With this information you will have a clear view of the magnitude of the project enabling you to accurately calculate costs and likely duration timeframes.

Step 5: Fix & Package Compatibility Issues
Assignments that presented issues during the “Assess Compatibility” phase need to be fixed to run on Windows 7.

Organizations also implementing application virtualization, perhaps as part of an optimized desktop strategy, need to convert applications to the required format for their virtualization technology.

Application fixing and format conversion can be a time-consuming, manual process, so utilizing technology to automate this and leveraging investment in packaged applications can yield considerable savings, and ensure a consistent approach to application readiness.

The Flexera Software solution automates the complex process of fixing compatibility issues, packaging, and converting applications to the required deployment format. It helps IT organizations quickly and reliably prepare for OS migrations and virtualization. If you are using your Windows 7 project as an initiative to standardize or implement software packaging, you can reliably repackage your applications in minutes and deploy software to desktops with 99 percent success or better.

Equally important, the Flexera Software solution can support your application virtualization strategies, enabling the quick conversion of applications for technologies such as Microsoft App-V™, VMware ThinApp™, and Citrix XenApp™. It simplifies your move to application virtualization by identifying which MSIs are good virtualization candidates and converting them to virtual packages automatically—with no extra repackaging required. And by taking a vendor-neutral approach, the Flexera Software solution maximizes your flexibility while directly addressing some of the biggest challenges of virtualization. For example:

- You don’t need to start from scratch when you move to the virtualization model because the solution has a clear, fast and complete process for converting legacy and existing MSI packages to virtual packages (or applications).
- Learning curves are minimal because the solution replaces the need for multiple vendor specific application packaging tools.

Figure 2: The Flexera Software solution simplifies the tasks of fixing compatibility issues and packaging applications into the desired deployment format.
Step 6: Deploy Packaged Applications Quickly and Cost-Effectively

Through the continuous application readiness approach, you can automate and accelerate the process of deploying applications directly to your configuration management system – without additional copying of files.

For example, the Flexera Software solution can pass packages to virtually any deployment solution, including Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager, LANDesk® Management Suite, Novell® Zenworks®, and others. It also facilitates distributing packages and patches via network destinations, FTP servers, administrative installations, and more through the Distribution Wizard feature.

The solution is also integrated with workflow management to make it easy to standardize and manage the packaging, virtualization, and Windows 7 migration process, as well as implement packaging best practices such as ITIL and Microsoft’s BDD.

Conclusion

As demonstrated by the six-step process for Windows 7 migration, continuous application readiness allows you to shift from reactive to proactive application management. The Flexera Software solution can be a source of significant benefits for many groups within the enterprise, and for the enterprise as a whole.

- IT managers can significantly reduce the cost and complexity of major migrations today while increasing the company’s preparedness for subsequent migrations, without sacrificing previous investments in packaging technology.
- IT staff can accelerate deployments and begin spending more time on strategic projects rather than on manual tasks.
- Developers can spend less time dealing with application conflicts and compatibility issues and focus more time on adding the new features end users are requesting.
- Employees, customers, and partners get more reliable access to their applications on the latest platform, such as Windows 7, without outages or interruptions in service caused by migration issues.
- The enterprise gains a new level of agility in responding to fast-changing business conditions, competitive threats, and customer needs.

For More Information

You can learn more about Flexera Software application readiness solution by visiting http://www.flexerasoftware.com/products/application-readiness.htm. Or contact Flexera Software at 1-800-809-5659 to speak directly with a representative.

About Flexera Software

Flexera Software is the leading provider of strategic solutions for Application Usage Management; solutions delivering continuous compliance, optimized usage and maximized value to application producers and their customers. Flexera Software is trusted by more than 80,000 customers that depend on our comprehensive solutions – from installation and licensing, entitlement and compliance management to application readiness and enterprise license optimization – to strategically manage application usage and achieve breakthrough results realized only through the systems-level approach we provide. Flexera Software is a privately-held company and an investment of private equity firm Thoma Bravo, LLC. For more information, please go to: http://www.flexerasoftware.com