

Login VSI moves into virtual desktop end-user experience with Login PI tool

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Login VSI, best known for its benchmark performance simulations for sizing virtual desktop systems, has moved into end-user experience measurement and monitoring with a new product – Login PI. The tool, designed for production environments rather than the test labs the company previously targeted, simulates a 'real' virtual user that launches applications and continuously records the response times, generating alerts when there are discrepancies. It's based on the core automation engine that runs the Login VSI test and validation product. Future versions of Login PI could take the company further down the road toward more granular application-performance monitoring.

The 451 Take

The new Login PI tool repurposes the expertise Login VSI already built in testing back-end virtual desktop infrastructure by simulating users and pre-configured workloads – Login PI now extends the same idea to measure user experience. And although in many ways it is a more simplistic method of monitoring than full-power, application-performance-monitoring systems that provide far more detailed information, and look for root causes, it can be a less intrusive and more predictable way of spotting problems before users themselves notice. The questions are, how far will it lead Login VSI in the direction of the highly cutthroat APM market sector, and will some of its existing partnerships be affected along the way as competitive overlap increases?

Context

Login VSI is a spinoff of Netherlands-based Login Consultants, a specialist in end-user computing that has spun off a series of startups to sell software tools built in connection with its consultancy

work. Immidio, with its Flex Profiles, was the first, emerging in 2008. Last month it was acquired by VMware.

Login VSI, with its eponymous virtual desktop-performance-testing product, came second, launching in 2012, and claims to have seen compound annual growth rates of more than 200% since its creation. It has about 40 staff, over 700 customers and has moved its headquarters to Santa Clara, California. The third, most recent, spinoff is Automation Machine, which focuses on simplifying and automating workspace management.

Products

The flagship Login VSI product is widely used by virtual desktop ISVs to benchmark performance and provide system-sizing guidelines for supporting a given number of users. But it's also used by end-user organizations, IT consultancies and hosting providers to size deployments at the planning stage, and in production for load-testing and change-prediction management. Version 4.1 was released in August. It works with VMware Horizon View, Citrix XenDesktop and XenApp, and Microsoft Remote Desktop Services (aka Terminal Services), as well as other Windows-based virtual desktop products. The Login VSI engine simulates real user activities using synthetic users and pre-configured workloads - and this is what is at the core of the new product.

Known over the beta-testing period as Login VUM (for virtual monitoring), Login PI uses the same underlying automation engine as Login VSI, but it's packaged to measure the performance of production virtual-desktop environments. A virtual user is set up to run fixed workloads regularly, so it's easier to see changes from the norm before they affect the real users. Monitoring real users, as most other tools do, is far less predictable, because the behavior of a normal user will never be the same - and when any problems do become evident, it's already too late.

Login PI links up with existing production virtual-desktop infrastructure and server-based computing production environments (Citrix, Microsoft, VMware, etc.) and with Active Directory. No agents or installations are needed, although some AD configuration work is required. There are two primary components: the Login PI Server and the Login PI Launcher. The Server (which can be installed on a physical or virtual server) includes a file share and database (Microsoft SQL Server), as well as the browser-based, admin console.

The Launcher initiates the remote virtual-user test sessions through the VDI client (i.e., Citrix Receiver or Horizon View Client), and polls the Server to see if jobs are scheduled for execution. It can also be run in a virtual machine or on a server or desktop, generally in the same location as the

real users – often at branch locations, for instance.

Strategy

Login PI is aimed at IT administrators and managers for on-premises applications and at service providers offering desktop as a service. The general simplicity of the product – which Login VSI says can be installed and running in less than 15 minutes – is also reflected in the straightforward licensing, charged per user, per year (following an evaluation period).

There's also a lot of flexibility about how it is configured across an organization – for those requiring only a lightweight system, a centralized Server working with a single Launcher in each branch running on a VM is an option. Login PI will mostly be sold direct, although there are some systems integrator partners in place. There will be an obvious cross-selling opportunity to existing Login VSI customers, but as an end-user tool, Login PI is potentially a much larger sales prospect.

The tool doesn't go into root cause analysis, and its current plan for this is to provide integration with other tools – the most frequently asked for being Microsoft System Center Operations Manager and Splunk, although it can integrate into any SNMP-compatible software, or any product that can read the Windows Event log.

Nor does the product currently go much beyond the measurement of application start times – although release 1.0 does include the ability to allow scripted events as part of a workload, so logging in and performing queries to measure application performance is an option. Such capabilities start to move into APM territory. Other plans for future releases include customization of pre-configured workloads, more testing tools and scripting support, and more client-specific performance testing. An eventual move toward root cause and machine learning seems inevitable.

Competition

Traditionally, we've put Login VSI in the VDI assessment, testing and benchmarking space, where there's not a great deal of opposition. Liquidware Labs' Stratusphere FIT is a VDI assessment tool, and there's an end-user experience product called Stratusphere UX.

Goliath Technologies launched a Logon Simulator for Citrix in November 2014, perhaps the most directly comparable product. Lakeside Software, eG Innovations and Citrix EdgeSight are in the same broad category of performance management tools specifically aimed at virtual desktops. Most of these tools provide much broader monitoring, performance, validation and diagnostics such as CPU utilization and IOPs throughput from storage. However, those figures don't directly correlate

to actual user experience and are hard to normalize – and interpretation can be further complicated by mechanisms such as read-ahead caching.

Traditional load-testing products include HP LoadRunner, Borland SilkTest and IBM Rational Performance Tester. And there's a new crop of Web and cloud load-testing startups including SOASTA, Neotys, Grid Robotics, Apica, BlazeMeter, LoadStorm and CloudPuncher. Mainstream application performance management vendors include New Relic and AppDynamics. Again, these provide a great deal more information, as well as advanced features such as root cause analysis.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

The new Login PI tool repurposes the expertise Login VSI has already built up in testing backend virtual desktop infrastructure.

Opportunities

There is an obvious cross-selling opportunity to existing Login VSI customers, but as an end-user tool, Login PI is potentially a much larger sales prospect.

Weaknesses

In its first release, the Login PI product doesn't go much beyond the measurement of application start times, and the times of scripted events within apps.

Threats

As Login VSI moves into the highly cutthroat APM market sector, some of its existing partnerships may be affected as competitive overlap increases.

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