the 451 group

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Imprivata expands authentication management and SSO to VDI infrastructure

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Event summary

- Imprivata has integrated features for virtual desktop infrastructure session security including authentication management, single sign-on access to applications, user roaming and location awareness as well as user audit and compliance reporting.
- The company has not productized the VDI features, instead slotting them into its OneSign appliance – which is also now available as a virtualized version – since it views VDI as part of a broader set of authentication management requirements.
- Imprivata has done technical heavy lifting at the agent to engineer its VDI functionality – in contrast to existing gateway and profile management approaches. Can it make headway in strategic verticals like healthcare where VDI is taking root?

The 451 take

Imprivata has made the astute decision to build virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) support into what we have described as its authentication management middleware, and frame it as one element within the scope of its technology. It's not unrealistic to be more optimistic about VDI adoption; but equally, the pragmatic expectation is that adoption will be erratic and use-case driven. The challenge for Imprivata lies in converting its early investments into tangible, productive partnerships with infrastructure vendors – especially to validate its agent-level approach. For the moment, VDI support makes tactical sense given Imprivata's customer base, and can serve as a competitive differentiation since it expands the scope of its management capabilities.

Details

As part of a broader strategic focus on consolidated authentication management middleware, **Imprivata** has solidified its ability to provide an access management and user management layer for VDI – alongside the development of a virtualized version of its OneSign appliance to run in datacenters.

Expectations for VDI catalyzing a secular shift in endpoint computing are probably premature – with performance high on the list of technical hurdles that stand in the way of broader adoption. But the market is showing distinct signs of life around specific uses cases (with **Morgan Stanley's** deployment serving as one example). But clearly, security and managing the user experience in a way that is consistent with policies is a crucial

consideration. Imprivata views VDI in terms of a related cluster of market requirements with a common set of challenges: how can all modes of access activity (both physical and logical) and password usage be correlated to a single user, and how can that correlated identity serve both to improve risk posture by informing the definition of and monitoring of access policies, as well as improve productivity through consolidated user workflows?

The company has worked in conjunction with VDI vendors, most notably **VMware** and **Sun Microsystems** (now part of **Oracle**, of course) to interoperate with the VDI agent and provide some level of authentication controls and enterprise single sign-on (SSO) within the guest OS. This is not is a trivial technical challenge, since it effectively involves authentication at the agent level, and capturing authentication events during the VDI session back to a centralized logging and reporting engine.

Imprivata has demonstrated solid growth over the course of 2009, with healthcare emerging as its strongest vertical, although financial services, pharmaceuticals and state and local government are strong too. Customer count is above 900, up from around 700 a year ago, Imprivata contends.

Competitive landscape

We have seen VDI popping up on the roadmap of identity management vendors and heard some talk of strategic development alliances, but little in the way of visible technology. This may be explained by the amount of attention that **the cloud** and SaaS have garnered relative to VDI. Sun had done some IAM integration with Sun Ray technology – but would still partner with Imprivata for authentication management.

Virtualization platform vendor **Citrix** has taken a gateway approach to VDI authentication management through a modified SSL VPN access gateway, while **F5 Networks** and **Juniper Networks** advocate use of their SSL VPN appliances for VDI user management. Imprivata's authentication management and SSO could be viewed as complementary to the host of vendors that have sprung up to provide management of persistent user profiles and personalized application settings across multiple end-user devices such as **Liquidware** Labs, **AppSense**, **RTO Software** and **RES Software**. **Symantec**, **Quest Software**, **MokaFive** and **Virtual Computer** all have user profile management pieces, too.

In healthcare, **Sentillion**, which was recently assimilated into **Microsoft** after its acquisition, looms large but typically targets larger customers and focuses more on provisioning. **Passlogix** is another SSO vendor with a healthcare footprint.