

Centralizing Application Access with visionapp Workspace Management 2008

visionapp is well-known because of their free Remote Desktop client (vRD) and they have just released their brand-new 2008 product line. The main products are the visionapp Workspace Management and Server Management. Both products are bound together in the visionapp **Application Delivery Management Suite**. The visionapp Application Center (vAC) and the visionapp Secure Logon (vSL) are the two independent components of the Workspace Management.

The main focus of this article is the **visionapp Application Center** and how visionapp Workspace Management helps to centralize web-based application access. Not just for Citrix seamless- or streaming- application but also for Microsoft RemoteApp or SoftGrid streaming applications. Even this was not enough for visionapp and is the reason why local applications can be launched from the web, as well.

Note: As a freelancer, I've worked as the part-time Product Manager for visionapp Workspace Management since March 2007.

visionapp Workspace Management (vWM)

The Workspace Management centralizes application access over the web in a secure way. The visionapp Application Center (vAC) and the visionapp Secure Logon (vSL) are the two independent components of the vWM. The Secure Logon adds an extra security layer for different authentication methods like RADIUS, two-factor authentication or client certificates.

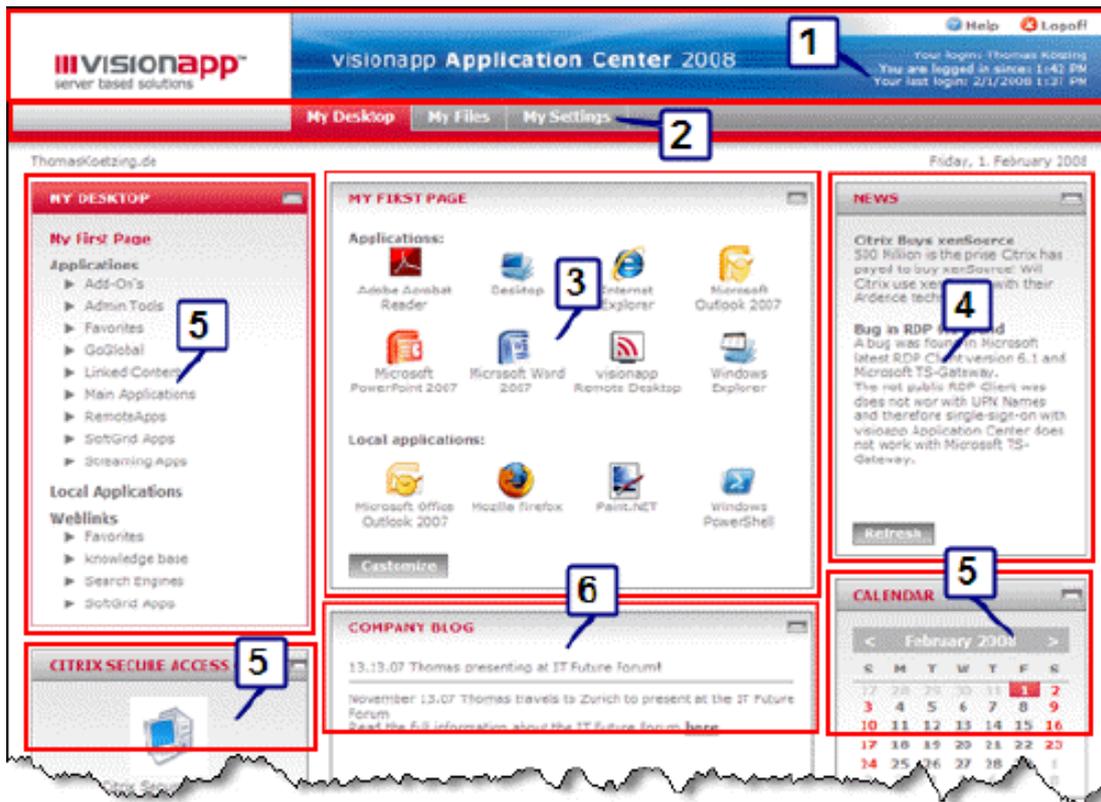
As an extra value, the vSL is a free part of the Enterprise Edition. The Secure Logon requires several existing components in the infrastructure as Active Directory, SQL Database and a Microsoft ISA Server.

visionapp Application Center (vAC)

The Application Center is a dotNET web application programmed in C# that runs on Microsoft Internet Information Services (IIS). Citrix and Microsoft 2008 Farms are smoothly integrated and managed through the visionapp management console.

To ensure enterprise services, the Application Center uses a SQL database (or the free SQL express edition) to store all the information needed. Using a database has a lot of advantages, but with a database in the background stateless web session can be used by the vAC. This is very important for load-balanced web servers and often used when centralizing application access.

Before I continue, let's have a look at the default frontend of the visionapp Application Center.

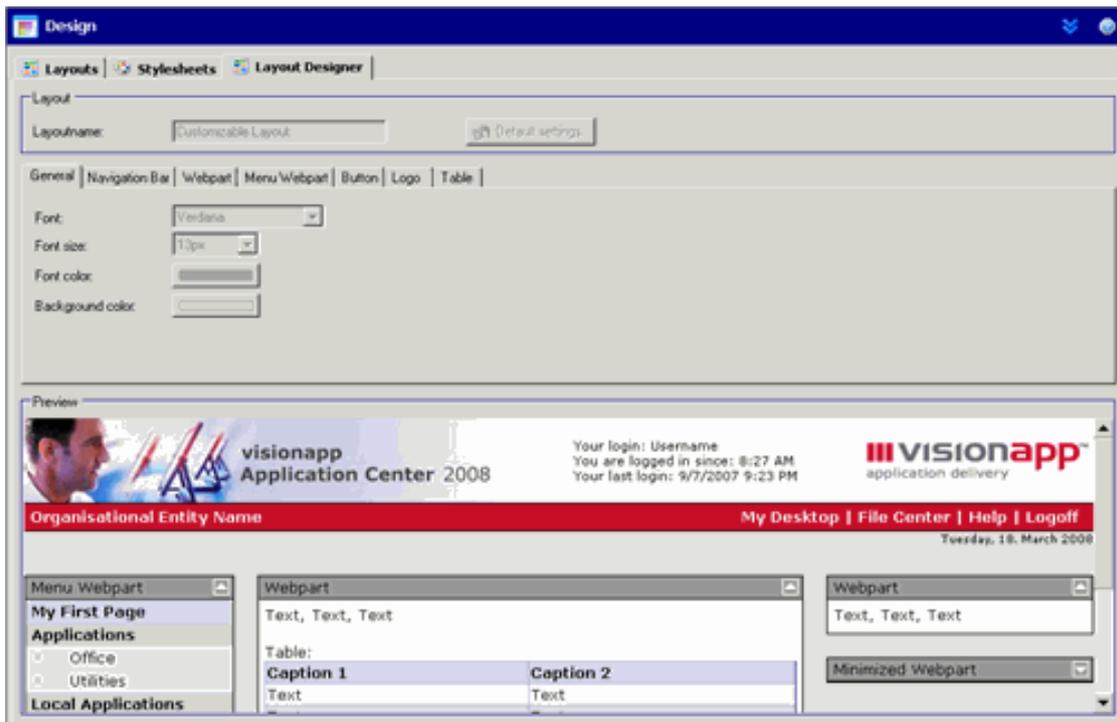


visionapp Application Center Default Layout

- [1] Header with useful Information like last login time and user name
- [2] Dashboards with other integrations like access to internal file shares, owa, user help etc.
- [3] Application set customized by the user and with any application type.
- [4] News web part with content per user, group and/or timeframe.
- [5] Different web parts that can be freely placed on the website.
- [6] Custom web parts (modules) shown per user, group and/or access rule.

The whole layout of the Application Center is fully customizable with a layout designer.

In the Enterprise Edition, different layouts can be assigned to different organizational entities.

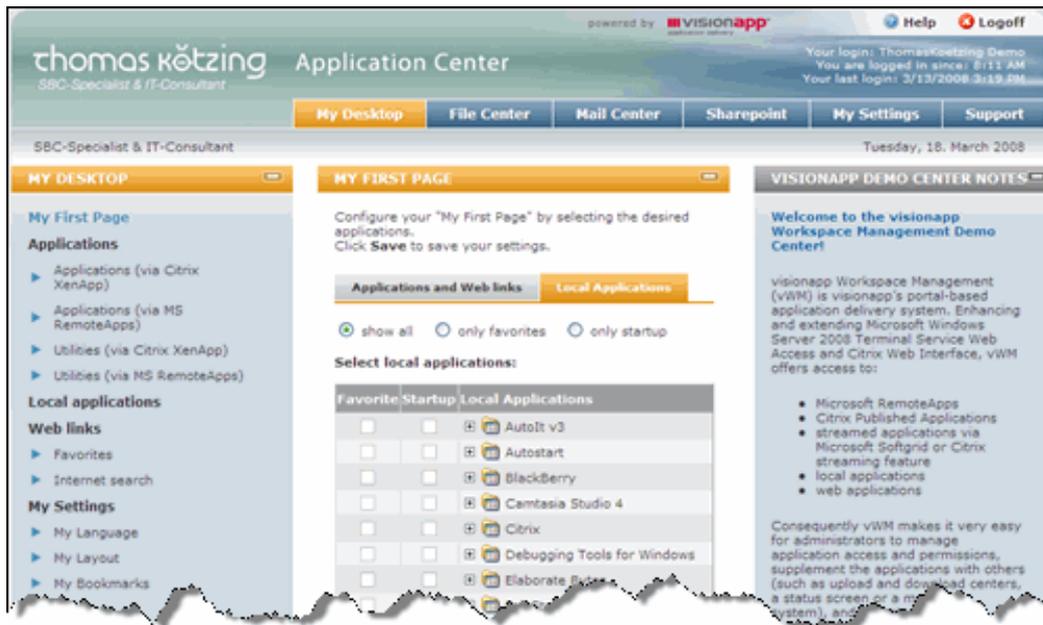


Layout Designer

Within the website, vAC web parts (like modules) can be freely placed and made accessible only for users, groups and/or defined access rules (IP addresses, Host header etc.). Users can customize their personal main page and set favorites, auto launch of applications or add local applications to the site.

An Active-X control is used to give access to the local client file system. In addition, some Internet Explorer settings are required to browse the "All Users" start menu. Every local client can have different applications in different locations and, therefore, local applications are per device.

Nevertheless, local applications can be auto-launched, as well.



Adding Local Applications to the Personal Page

Application Center Editions

The Application Center is delivered in three different versions and explained here in short. For a full description, visit the visionapp product page. As a basic rule, every higher Edition includes all features of the lower edition.

Standard Edition

The focus of the Standard Edition is Microsoft SoftGrid and Server 2008 in small environments. Microsoft customers get a lot of extra features with visionapp Application Center compared with Microsoft Terminal Services Web Access 2008. Most attractive are the RemoteApp's which are displayed per user or group. Through an Active-X control Single-Sign-On is available to RemoteApp's. The Application Center integrates Microsoft SoftGrid applications, as well, and is the only product in the market which offers that functionality. Also, Microsoft new Terminal Server Gateway is fully supported with the vAC 2008. With favorite user applications and auto launch, the Application Center fits perfectly in a Windows Server 2008 "only" environment.

Advanced Edition

The Advanced Edition adds Citrix to the feature list. Again, the Application Center is the only product in the market that can integrate Citrix and Microsoft applications at the same time. Microsoft SoftGrid, Microsoft RemoteApp's, Citrix streaming- or Citrix seamless applications can be accessed side by side. Citrix Secure Gateway and Access Gateway Standard are fully supported as well as the file access with LiveEdit of Access Gateway Advanced.

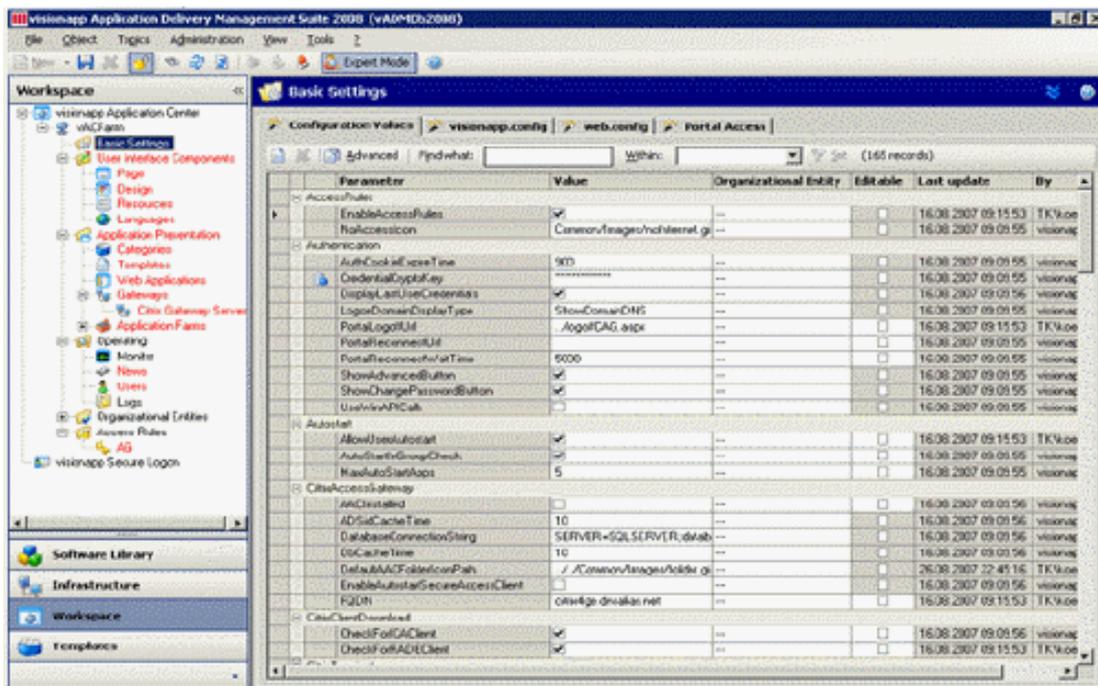
Base requirement is the free Citrix component Web Interface, but visionapp Application Center starts where Web Interface ends. You can add some functionality with modifications from my website, but all of that and more is already included in the vAC. News or notifications are scheduled by time and/or user/group, custom favorite applications, custom auto launch for one or more application of any type, Citrix Secure Access Client launch, and so on.

Enterprise Edition

High availability, high security and more flexibility are the keywords for the Enterprise Edition. Enterprise features like the virtual Farm concept enables simplified disaster recovery scenarios. Secure access to internal file shares, integration of local applications, access rules, unlimited organizational entities, Client certificate authentication, User self-Administration and much more is included to support large environments. The Application Center runs today in 10,000+ User environments and has proven many times the quality of an enterprise product.

Application Center Features

The features of the visionapp Application Center are way too numerous to list all in this article. Visit the visionapp Workspace Management product page for a full description. Actually, all those features can make the configuration a bit difficult since there are a lot of options that can be set in the management console. An expert mode and/or wizards would really simplify the initial configuration part.



Sample of Options that can be set in the Management Console

Some Features:

- Favorite applications per user or pre-set by the Administrator
- Auto-launch of one or more applications of any type or pre-set by the Administrator
- Integration of RemoteApp, Seamless Apps, Streamed Apps, SoftGrid Apps, local Apps, virtual Desktops, Web Apps or linked content.
- Microsoft RemoteApp with Single-Sign-On and user/group based access.
- Controlled access to internal file shares with only an Internet browser
- Full customizable website and a layout designer for basic customization.
- Import and Export of any created Application Center layout
- Scheduled news or notifications per user/group and/or timeframe
- Gateway support for Citrix Access-, Secure Gateway and Microsoft TS Gateway
- High availability through SQL Database, load balancing, database failover, virtual Farm concept, XML/WMI service monitor, and auto site replication
- High security through integration of the visionapp Secure Logon

- Rule based access for any web part, dashboard, Farms etc.
- Documented API to fully support custom web parts based on C#
- Multi-site configuration and multi-organizational entities support
- User self-Administration for user AD properties.

Centralizing Application Access

Over the decades, companies have centralized application delivery with Citrix Presentation Server, Microsoft terminal services or other multi-user solutions. Nevertheless, users have to manage their applications through different locations. Sure there are several portal solutions out there like Microsoft Sharepoint, IBM Websphere etc., but they are all focused on content management and they are "big animals" difficult to handle.

Integrating application access in a smart way for Citrix and/or Microsoft can be a real challenge. Thinking about TS Web Access 2008 web part with Sharepoint? As per Microsoft, this will only work when Sharepoint runs on Server 2008 and still with no user or group access level.

Regardless if Microsoft RemoteApp, SoftGrid or Citrix seamless- or streaming applications are being used, the visionapp Application Center can be deployed within an hour and ready for use! With three different versions, customers have the freedom to choose the best for their environments. If visionapp would add some basic content management, then the Application Center could replace most companies' Intranet sites and be the user's central place to access applications from everywhere.

Licensing visionapp Workspace Management

The visionapp Workspace Management is licensed per named user. In addition, a standard license of visionapp Server Management 2008 is required for each web server where vWM is installed. Enterprise customers can get volume discounts and a rent model exists for Outsourcing-/SaaS-Provider.

Summary

visionapp Application Center enables companies to centralize application access. Application delivery is often centralized in the back-end of the infrastructure, but end-users have no centralized access to their applications regardless of local, seamless, streamed, RemoteApp or Desktops.

visionapp Workspace Management 2008 is a step in the future of application delivery, from the "back-end" to the "front-end" - centralized. If visionapp extends the Application Center with some content management, more user self-service, and spending some time on a proxy solution it can then become the standard solution for centralized application access.

Looking at Citrix and Microsoft, visionapp Application Center continues where Citrix Web Interface ends and where Microsoft TS Web Access 2008 will not be over the next years. If you are thinking about a mixed environment with Citrix and Microsoft, then Workspace Management is the only complete solution to do it.

Advantages

- High availability even in the Standard Edition
- Customizable auto launch and favorite user applications
- Citrix and Microsoft Server 2008 applications side by side
- Enterprise ready and proven product
- Application Center API for full customization of web parts
- Stateless web sessions required for Web Server load balancing
- Virtual Farm concept, SQL Database, failover, site replication support
- Integration of internal file shares with file type restrictions, etc.
- Access rules for user, groups, header, IP address, etc.
- Gateway support for Microsoft and Citrix
- Free Secure Logon solution for the Enterprise Edition
- XML/WMI monitor for application stability
- Integrated layout designer with Import or Export of designs
- Multi-lingual (~20 languages available) and easy to add other languages
- Extended error logging even for application launch
- Easy integration to existing Citrix or Microsoft environments
- Works without visionapp Server Management
- Fully automated vAC installation with visionapp Server Management

Disadvantages

- Too many options in the management console (no expert mode)
- No (initial) configuration wizard(s)
- No official support/integration with other gateways
- Needs more web parts that come with the base installation
- No content management to use vAC as intranet solution
- No streaming fallback with Citrix streaming applications
- Internet Explorer required to get full user experience (Active-X controls)