

On the Radar: IGEL enables secure thin client use anywhere

Taking endpoint management to remote workers on the public Internet

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Summary

Catalyst

IGEL is a developer of thin client technology that has been extended into an endpoint management software play. It has now added a USB drive with its operating system, enabling a secure thin client environment to run on any 64-bit, x86 machine, and has extended its management capabilities to devices that are not on a corporate network.

Key messages

- IGEL is a thin and zero client vendor with a secure, read-only Linux operating system, IGEL OS, and endpoint management software for Windows and IGEL OS devices.
- It offers conversion software to re-image 64-bit, x86 devices with IGEL OS, then manage them with its Universal Management Suite (UMS).
- It offers IGEL OS on a thumbnail-size USB drive, from which a remote user can boot any 64-bit x86 device for a secure, fully-managed thin client experience.
- Its endpoint management goes beyond corporate networks to the public Internet, enabling central management of IGEL OS devices anywhere.

Ovum view

IGEL's move to a software-centric approach to the market, positioning itself as an endpoint management company, chimes with current trends in remote and mobile working, as well as enabling the repurposing of existing devices. Ovum expects to see it pick up more business, particularly in North America, with this strategy.

Recommendations for enterprises

Why put IGEL on your radar?

IGEL can now offer the security of a centrally managed thin client experience from any 64-bit, x86 device with 2GB of RAM and 2GB of storage, making it suitable for remote workers, contractors, and road warriors. It has a management console that is rich in features and is bundled into device licensing rather than charged for separately. As SMB organizations migrate to cloud-delivered virtual desktops, IGEL enables BYOD, by “temporarily” and non-destructively converting any 64-bit x86 PC, laptop, Mac, or thin client into a managed client that IT can be sure is secure and managed.

Highlights

IGEL's core business remains its hardware-based Universal Desktop (UD) thin client portfolio. In this market, it competes against two giant market leaders: Dell and HP. It seeks to differentiate its products against them by offering five instead of three years' warranty, bundling the management

software in with the device license, and supporting products for three years after they have been end-of-lifed.

However, IGEL has always faced the handicap, in the world's largest market, the US, that it is a German company, because US enterprises have tended to prefer to get their hardware from US suppliers. It has recently moved to address by hiring some key executives to bolster its US market position, changing to an English-first marketing approach and completely redesigning its website. Even more importantly, however, it is transitioning to a software-led strategy.

The company recognizes that a central asset for its hardware business and beyond is its secure, read-only, 64-bit Linux operating system, IGEL OS. It can manage all devices running the OS on a corporate network with its Universal Management Suite (UMS). In response to the changes in work habits, with more employees working from home or out and about, it has extended this management capability to all and any IGEL OS device connecting across the public Internet, using its IGEL Cloud Gateway software, which is responsible for providing the policy and contextual permissions for each device as it boots up.

IGEL has for several years offered the ability, with its Universal Desktop Converter (UDC) software, to wipe a PC or competitor's thin client and install IGEL OS and bring the device under UMS control. It has now added the ability to sidestep the re-imaging process with an even smaller thumb drive that carries IGEL OS, so that users can boot from there and run a secure, centrally managed thin client environment, managed over the Internet by the Cloud Gateway.

The renewed emphasis on software is leading IGEL to seek more partnerships with hardware vendors that currently have no thin client offering. Samsung is already an OEM partner for the operating system and UMS, and others are expected to follow.

Beyond that, the company is starting to consider the potential for its software in the emerging Internet of Things (IoT) market. While its OS is too big for something like a sensor, there are clearly opportunities to put it onto multiple other types of device.

Background

IGEL was founded in 1989 by CEO Heiko Gloge, originally as the NetCom division of Melchers, a diversified conglomerate. IGEL was created primarily for developing and distributing the first multivideo graphic cards for [Unix](#) environments. It began developing and distributing computer terminals in 1992 and introduced its first thin client in 1997. IGEL became a standalone subsidiary of Melchers in 2001.

Current position

IGEL's largest business activity is still the Citrix-attached sale of its UD thin clients for virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) environments, with the VMware Horizon alternative a growing part of its activities. The company has 17,000 enterprise customers.

However, in addition to a range of thin clients for the desktop and so-called zero clients (compact client-end devices used in VDI environments), IGEL has been expanding in new directions. It offers the ability to replace the operating system on legacy x86 machines with IGEL OS by using its UDC product, the minimum requirement on the device receiving its OS being 2GB of RAM and 2GB of storage capacity.

Once converted into an IGEL thin client, the device can be managed by the company's UMS software, which it bundles into the per-device licensing fee rather than charging for it separately, a means of differentiating its offering from competitors such as Dell and HP.

IGEL now also offers a portable thin client called the UD Pocket. This is an 8GB hardened USB thumb drive with IGEL OS preloaded, which plugs into any device running 64-bit x86 processors, enabling a user to boot from the UD Pocket environment, without re-imaging the device (unlike with UDC), and have it managed by UMS.

Use cases are estates of desktops or competitors' thin clients that a customer wants to bring under UMS management, but also mobile and remote workers. For the latter scenario, in tandem with the UD Pocket, the company also launched the IGEL Cloud Gateway, which extends the UMS management capability beyond the corporate network to any device running IGEL OS on the public internet.

The Gateway can reside in a public cloud or on the customer's premises. It is a multi-tenanted platform that IGEL believes has potential for managed service providers (MSPs) that want to offer desktop-as-a-service.

Data sheet

Key facts

Table 1: Data sheet: IGEL

Product name	IGEL UD Pocket; IGEL Cloud Gateway	Product classification	Mobile thin client, endpoint management
Version number	1.01.100	Release date	IGEL UD Pocket: December 17; IGEL Cloud Gateway: February 17
Industries covered	All	Geographies covered	Global
Relevant company sizes	Medium to large enterprise	Licensing options	Software license per user
URL	www.igel.com	Routes to market	100% Channel
Company headquarters	Bremen, Germany	Number of employees	300+

Source: Ovum

Appendix

On the Radar

On the Radar is a series of research notes about vendors bringing innovative ideas, products, or business models to their markets. Although On the Radar vendors may not be ready for prime time,

they bear watching for their potential impact on markets and could be suitable for certain enterprise and public sector IT organizations.

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