On the Radar: Droplet Computing makes application portability possible for the mobile workforce

Transforming the way applications are deployed to work with today's multimodal environments

Summary

Catalyst

The IT environment is continually changing, but change increases complexity for CIOs, as new systems and services are deployed while older ones remain in place, effectively creating a hybrid environment. The challenge in managing this hybrid environment is the lack of application portability, with applications tied to a specific platform or technology, and this means that new ways of working are hampered by incumbent technology. This report highlights a new approach to application containerization.

Key messages

- Droplet Computing enables containerized applications to access the features of the native platform.
- It runs applications in the browser of the device and works both online and offline.
- It works for Linux and Windows applications that users want to use on non-Windows as well as Windows devices.

Ovum view

The application deployment market has recently been dominated by the rise of Docker and the containers movement. A Docker container requires a platform to run on, which makes it suitable for some workloads – mostly newly generated cloud-native ones. However, it does not solve the end-user challenge of accessing applications offline. Most end-user application deployments today are delivered using some form of emulation technology, whereby an agent on the device runs the application as if it were on its native platform. This approach has limitations in terms offline functionality, performance, and management.

Recommendations for enterprises

Why put Droplet Computing on your radar?

The application deployment space is considered to be a mature market dominated by a couple of large vendors. However, the solutions have been designed for a limited set of technologies, typically based around Intel chipsets, and are not compatible with the low-powered Atom and ARM chipsets found in many mobile devices. Droplet Computing takes a new approach by inserting a small abstraction layer in the application container, which means that the application can run natively on any platform.

Highlights

Droplet Computing is currently designed to work with Linux and Windows applications, and makes them accessible to users on any device – mobile, Chromebook, or laptop – both online and offline.

The application is housed in a container that includes the Layer-X technology and is run from within the browser. The containerized approach is not new, but Droplet Computing has addressed the challenge from the end user's perspective, making the deployment simple and the experience native.

Background

Droplet Computing was founded in 2014 in Kidderminster, UK, by CEO Steve Horne and CTO Peter von Oven, two end-user computing experts with many years' experience in the industry. Droplet Computing has developed a patent-pending application delivery container technology that enables both Linux and Windows applications to run natively on any device. It is backed by Draper Esprit, a leading venture capital firm that invests in and develops high-growth digital technology businesses, which recently announced a commitment of £6.6m to three exciting new European-based digital technology businesses including Droplet Computing. Droplet Computing is due to exit stealth mode in April 2018.

Current position

The Droplet Computing solution works by running an application inside a container and executing it in the browser. Using the native browser for the host allows the application to access all the native functionality that a user would expect. Ovum considers this native ability to be a critical value-driver of the solution. If an application is run on a non-native platform in emulation mode, then access to printers, files systems, and removable media, for example, is not always possible without complex configuration or third-party plug-ins.

Another strength of Droplet Computing's approach is that the user can simply download the container from a central server to their device, without requiring IT support or any elevated privileges to install it. The container is a complete isolated packet that can use all of the features of the underlying platform, such as the language and keyboard settings.

From an IT management perspective, Droplet Computing preserves centralized security settings while simplifying deployment and management. The packaging process is also simplified, so IT administrators can quickly build up a library of containerized applications and make them available for users to select and download. The benefits of Droplet Computing's approach are very compelling, and while it currently only supports Linux and Windows applications running on non-Windows devices, the company does have a roadmap of further development.

Data sheet

Key facts

Table 1: Data sheet: Droplet Computing

Product name	Droplet Computing	Product classification	Application deployment
Version number	1.0	Release date	2018
Industries covered	All	Geographies covered	All
Relevant company sizes	All	Licensing options	Per container for single app, multiple apps, and multiple devices
URL	http://www.dropletcomputing.com	Routes to market	Channel, enterprise and consumer sales
Company headquarters	Birmingham, UK	Number of employees	<20

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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