Configure Desktop Composition on an RD Session Host Server

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Applies To: Windows Server 2008 R2

Desktop composition provides the user interface elements of Windows Aero, such as translucent windows, for remote desktop sessions. By default, desktop composition is not allowed when connecting to a computer running Windows Server 2008 R2.

◆ Important

Because Windows Aero requires additional system and bandwidth resources, allowing desktop composition for remote desktop sessions can reduce connection performance, particularly over slow links, and increase the load on the Remote Desktop Session Host (RD Session Host) server.

Desktop composition is not available for RemoteApp sessions. In addition, the client computer must have the necessary hardware to support Windows Aero features.

Manually configuring desktop composition

To manually configure desktop composition on an RD Session Host server, you need to do the following:

- Install the Desktop Experience feature.

- Start the Themes service.

- Enable the **Allow desktop composition for remote desktop sessions** Group Policy setting.

- Set the maximum color depth to 32 bits per pixel.

Install the Desktop Experience feature

For information about installing Desktop Experience, see Install Desktop Experience on an RD Session Host Server.

Start the Themes service

Use the following procedure to start the Themes service on the RD Session Host server.

Membership in the local **Administrators** group, or equivalent, on the RD Session Host server that you plan to configure, is the minimum required to complete this procedure. Review details about using the appropriate accounts and group memberships at http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=83477.

To start the Themes service

1. On the RD Session Host server, open the Services snap-in. To open the Services snap-in, click **Start**, point to **Administrative Tools**, and then click **Services**.

2. If the **User Account Control** dialog box appears, confirm that the action it displays is what you want, and then click **Yes**.

3. In the Services pane, right-click **Themes**, and then click **Properties**.

4. On the **General** tab, in the **Startup type** box, select **Automatic**, and then click **Apply**.

5. Under **Service status**, click **Start**.

6. Click **OK** to close the **Themes Properties** dialog box.

7. Confirm that the **Status** column for the Themes service displays **Started**.

Enable the Allow desktop composition for remote desktop sessions Group Policy setting

To allow desktop composition when connecting to a computer running Windows Server 2008 R2, you must enable the **Allow desktop composition for remote desktop sessions** Group Policy setting. The **Allow desktop composition for remote desktop sessions** Group Policy setting is located in **Computer Configuration\Policies\Administrative Templates\Windows Components\Remote Desktop Services\Remote Desktop Session Host\Remote Session Environment** and can be configured by using either Local Group Policy Editor or the Group Policy Management Console (GPMC).

For more information about Group Policy settings for Remote Desktop Services, see the Remote Desktop Services Technical Reference (http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=138134).

Set the maximum color depth to 32 bits per pixel

Use the following procedure to set the maximum color depth to 32 bits per pixel on the RD Session Host server.

Membership in the local **Administrators** group, or equivalent, on the RD Session Host server that you plan to configure, is the minimum required to complete this procedure. Review details about using the appropriate accounts and group memberships at http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=83477.

To set the maximum color depth to 32 bits per pixel

1. On the RD Session Host server, open Remote Desktop Session Host Configuration. To open Remote Desktop Session Host Configuration, click **Start**, point to **Administrative Tools**, point to **Remote Desktop Services**, and then click **Remote Desktop Session Host Configuration**.

2. If the **User Account Control** dialog box appears, confirm that the action it displays is what you want, and then click **Yes**.

3. Under **Connections**, right-click the name of the connection that you want to configure (for example, RDP-Tcp), and then click **Properties**.

4. On the **Client Settings** tab, in the **Limit Maximum Color Depth** box, select **32 bits per pixel**.

5. Click **OK**. Changes to color depth settings are not applied to sessions that are connected when the change is made. The changes will take effect the next time the user establishes a new connection to the RD Session Host server.

You can also set the maximum color depth by applying the **Limit maximum color depth** Group Policy setting. This Group Policy setting is located in **Computer Configuration\Policies \Administrative Templates\Windows Components\Remote Desktop Services\Remote Desktop Session Host\Remote Session Environment** and can be configured by using either Local Group Policy Editor or the Group Policy Management Console (GPMC). Note that the Group Policy setting will take precedence over the setting configured in Remote Desktop Session Host Configuration.

For more information about Group Policy settings for Remote Desktop Services, see the Remote Desktop Services Technical Reference (http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=138134).

Additional references

- Configure the Client Experience on an RD Session Host Server

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Community Additions