

RDS to AVD pre-migration checklist for MSPs



Why MSPs are moving away from RDS

Remote Desktop Services (RDS) served its purpose for many years, but Microsoft has shifted all development and innovation to Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD) and Windows 365. RDS is no longer receiving meaningful updates, and while it still functions, it's becoming increasingly outdated. MSPs who remain on it are left managing aging infrastructure that demands more effort for less return.

From a management standpoint, RDS requires extra components, such as connection brokers and gateways, creating unnecessary overhead. End users also face limitations—They log into server desktops designed for hosting applications, not delivering a modern Windows experience. Features like multi-monitor support are inconsistent, and the interface looks foreign compared to the Windows 10 or 11 desktops users expect.

AVD addresses these pain points and more. It eliminates the need for additional management servers, provides a familiar Windows desktop experience, supports multi-monitor setups, and integrates more cleanly with the broader Microsoft ecosystem. With FSLogix, profile management is faster and more reliable than the roaming profiles and profile servers often used in RDS environments. For many MSPs, the real advantage is that AVD simplifies licensing—organizations already using Microsoft 365 Business Premium gain built-in rights to access AVD, avoiding the need for separate RDS CALs.

While SPLA audits and compliance deadlines are one trigger for migration, many decisions are driven by usability, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. AVD simply performs better, scales more flexibly, and aligns with how organizations already work in the Microsoft cloud.

The risks of delaying migration

Migration can be intimidating, but holding off increases long-term risk. Sticking with RDS often means:

- Managing licensing complexity and overlapping costs.
- Supporting users on server desktops that no longer meet modern expectations.
- Carrying technical debt that makes migration harder later.
- Missing out on cost savings from features like auto-scaling.

End users care about performance, familiarity, and uptime—not which technology powers their desktops. That puts the responsibility on MSPs to proactively guide clients toward modern solutions before another provider steps in and offers a more efficient and cost-effective solution.

Preparing for a successful migration

The foundation of any successful migration is accurate scoping. User counts, profile sizes, application requirements, and data footprints must all be clearly understood. Hardware specifications from the RDS environment can be used as a benchmark, but the goal should be to deliver a noticeably better experience in AVD. Under-sizing creates performance issues; over-sizing drives up costs unnecessarily.

Application compatibility should also be confirmed early. While most applications that run in RDS will work in AVD, exceptions exist, particularly with multi-session environments. In those cases, pooled or single-session desktops may be needed. Coordination with software vendors is essential—some applications may require installation assistance, data migration, or even a costly upgrade to a supported version.

Data migration is often the largest factor influencing downtime. Copying large volumes of data into Azure can take time, and MSPs must decide whether to run incremental syncs or plan a complete cutover over a weekend. Clients should be told to expect downtime in some form, and planning around busy seasons or vacation schedules can help minimize disruption.

Data hygiene also plays a critical role. In an on-premises world, adding storage was a one-time purchase. In Azure, storage is consumption-based, so moving unnecessary terabytes directly increases monthly costs. Reviewing and archiving old data before migration can reduce costs significantly.

Many MSPs also benefit from running a small proof of concept (POC) or pilot before a full rollout. Testing a small group of users and core applications in AVD surfaces issues early and builds confidence that the larger deployment will succeed.



Preparing for a successful migration

1 Skipping vendor coordination

Many applications require vendor support during migration. Without early involvement, MSPs risk delays or unexpected upgrade costs when applications don't align with the new environment.

2 Misjudging VM sizing

Over-provisioning inflates costs, while under-provisioning frustrates end users with slow performance. Accurate scoping of user counts, workloads, and application requirements is essential.

3 Migrating all data "as is"

Bringing unnecessary terabytes into Azure drives up monthly costs in a consumption-based model. Clients may view AVD as too expensive simply because of poor data hygiene.

4 Overpromising zero downtime

Some disruption is inevitable, especially during data transfer. Setting unrealistic expectations can damage client trust when downtime occurs.

Best practices for smoother projects

1 Start with a pilot

Testing a small group of users and applications in AVD validates performance, surfaces issues early, and builds confidence before a full rollout.

2 Communicate clearly and often

Clients value transparency. Sharing timelines, downtime expectations, and acknowledging potential bumps keeps them informed and reassured throughout the process.

3 Prioritize data hygiene

Archiving or reorganizing old files before migration reduces costs and simplifies the move. Clean data ensures Azure storage remains affordable and efficient.

4 Design for improvement, not parity

The goal is not just to replicate RDS, but to deliver a better experience. Faster logins, stronger multi-monitor support, and the familiarity of Windows 11 desktops make the transition feel like an upgrade.

The RDS to AVD pre-migration checklist

This checklist will help you scope projects accurately, avoid surprises, and ensure a smooth transition from Microsoft RDS to AVD.



1 Evaluate your current RDS setup

Inventory your existing RDS deployment:

- Connection broker in use
- RDS gateway in use
- Age and specs of current servers

Confirm user details:

- Total number of RDS users
- Average and large profile sizes
- Identify power users with special requirements

Assess hardware readiness for AVD:

- Ensure capacity for faster, more modern user experiences
- Identify any dependencies requiring extra configuration

2 Assess end-user applications

Review applications used daily by customers

Confirm which apps you manage as the MSP

Validate app compatibility with multi-session AVD

Identify apps requiring pooled or single desktops

Explore Microsoft 365 Business Premium licensing for app consolidation

Flag any apps needing GPU or other advanced resources

3 Review RDS data footprint

- Audit user data and business application data stored in RDS**
- Determine which data must migrate, versus what can be archived or deleted**
- Segment users:**
 - Standard users
 - Power users (GPU or high-performance needs)
- Plan data hygiene to minimize unnecessary costs in consumption-based AVD**

4 Estimate AVD costs

- Calculate requirements for:**
 - Virtual network (vnet)
 - Resource groups
 - Host pools
 - Desktop images
 - Servers
- Use Nerdio's Cost Estimator for accurate projections**
- Enable auto-scaling to optimize ongoing costs**

5 Prepare for migration and downtime

- Build AVD environment (no downtime required)**
 - Schedule downtime window for data import:
 - From on-premises servers
 - From datacenters
- Communicate downtime plan with stakeholders and end users**

Why MSPs choose Nerdio

Manual migrations to AVD are complex. Building networks, host pools, images, and backup policies in native Azure requires deep expertise, and cost estimation can be challenging.

Nerdio speeds up and simplifies the entire process. Blueprints and automation make setup faster and more accurate. The built-in Cost Estimator allows MSPs to model environments realistically and avoid budget surprises. Go live engineers and a dedicated support team provide expert guidance throughout the project. Post-migration, features such as auto-scaling, image management, and Microsoft 365 integration help MSPs optimize costs and streamline ongoing management.

The result is a smoother migration process that avoids common pitfalls and positions MSPs to deliver a better user experience from day one.

Next steps

The pre-migration checklist included with this guide is designed to help you scope projects accurately, identify risks early, and set realistic expectations with your customers. Once completed, use [Nerdio's Cost Estimator](#) to model your environment and guide your quoting process.

Migrating doesn't have to be disruptive. With the right preparation and the right tools, it becomes an opportunity to modernize infrastructure, lower costs, and deliver a better experience for both MSPs and their clients.

Ready to get your migration rolling today or want some help planning your shift from RDS?

[Book a demo](#), and we'll walk you through everything you need to know for a seamless move to AVD.



About Nerdio

Nerdio is a leading provider of powerful, simplified cloud management solutions for businesses of all sizes. Trusted by managed service providers (MSPs) and enterprise IT departments alike, Nerdio equips organizations with seamless, cost-effective management tools for Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD), Windows 365, and comprehensive Modern Work solutions.

With thousands of customers worldwide, Nerdio accelerates cloud adoption, enabling companies to thrive in an era of hybrid work by providing modern, future-proof technology that adapts to evolving workplace needs.

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