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ActivClient and Windows 8

Summary

ActivClient and Windows 8 : ActivIdentity is currently working on ActivClient updates to provide support for the Windows 8 operating system.

ActivClient 7.0.1 is an initial ActivClient release providing partial support for Windows 8.

ActivClient 7.0.2 is an upcoming ActivClient release that will provide full support for Windows 8; it will be available early April 2013.

Customers using ActivClient 7.0 on Windows 8 will face some interoperability issues. ActivIdentity is addressing these issues in two upcoming ActivClient updates. Here is the list of improvements coming in each version related to Windows 8 support.

ActivClient 7.0.1:

- ActivClient 7.0 installation may fail if a reader is not connected during install. Workaround: connect a reader during installation.
- ActivClient 7.0 installation may fail on workstations connected to a large Active Directory domain. Workaround: use ActivClient 7.0 fix FIXS1211007 available from customer support. This issue is resolved in ActivClient 7.0.1.
- On the Windows logon screen, if you select a Smart Card icon under “Sign-in options”, you will be able to successfully logon to Windows, but ActivClient PIN cache will not be enabled, which will lead to repeated PIN prompts. As a workaround with ActivClient 7.0, use the Smart Card icon in the main Windows logon screen (next to “Other user”). This issue is resolved in ActivClient 7.0.1.
- If you access remote resources, Windows displays the list of available credentials in a Windows Security dialog box; certificates are displayed twice; selecting some of these doubled certificates leads to a second PIN prompt after a successful Windows authentication. This issue is resolved in ActivClient 7.0.1.
- If you try to authenticate to a web site with your smart card using Internet Explorer for the desktop, the browser may freeze. Workaround: make sure that Internet Explorer is not in Protected Mode – for example, you may need to add the site to your listed of “trusted sites”. This issue is resolved in ActivClient 7.0.1.
- When a PIN prompt appears, you may run into issues if you enter the PIN too slowly. This applies to several use cases, including with Internet Explorer. Workaround: enter the PIN within 5 seconds after the PIN prompt appears. Alternatively, it is possible to change the default timeout by changing the following registry key:
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Cryptography\Calais\TransactionTimeoutDelay (this registry key has to be created); the valid value range for the timeout is between 5 and 60 seconds. This issue is resolved in ActivClient 7.0.1.

ActivClient 7.0.2:

- With ActivClient 7.0.1, you can select the Smart Card icon in the main logon screen and perform a successful Windows logon; or you can select the User icon and perform a password logon. The “Sign-in options” feature is not available to enable switching the authentication mode from the User authentication screen. This issue will be resolved in ActivClient 7.0.2: ActivClient will then comply with the Windows 8 logon user experience.
- If you try to authenticate to a web site with your smart card using Internet Explorer in the Windows UI

(formerly referred to as “Metro mode”), the browser may freeze. Workaround: make sure that Internet Explorer is not in Protected Mode – for example, you may need to add the site to your listed of “trusted sites”. Alternative workaround: use Internet Explorer for the desktop. This issue will be resolved in ActivClient 7.0.2.

- Change PIN (accessible via the Windows “Change Password” menu) fails. Workaround: use a Windows 7 workstation to change the PIN. This issue will be resolved in ActivClient 7.0.2.
- ActivClient Unlock PIN dialog box display automatically on card insertion does not work. Recommend using Windows 7 for this function. This issue will be resolved in ActivClient 7.0.2.

Note: ActivClient 7.0.2 will also support all ActivClient standalone features such as card initialization, certificate download, etc. (same as in ActivClient 6.2).

Additional information about smart card logon on Windows 8

Windows 8 Standard behavior

With Windows 8, the main logon screen shows 1 icon (tile) per user, and another icon for “Other user”.

- When selecting this user tile, the user sees all authentication methods (password or certificates) as Sign-In options. When selecting a smart card icon as a Sign-in option, the user is prompted for a PIN instead of a password – and smart card PKI authentication is performed.

This is different from Windows 7, where multiple tiles appear on the main screen, one for password, one for each available smart card certificate – and when one authentication method was selected, you needed to select “Switch user” to change authentication method.

With ActivClient 7.0

On Windows 8, the main logon screen shows 1 icon per user, another icon for “Other user”, and additional icons for smart card certificates (1 per certificate compatible with Windows Logon).

- When selecting the user icon, the user can logon with a password. The user can also access certificates as Sign-In options. But if you then select a certificate from this screen, you can enter the PIN and logon successfully, BUT you don't have access to the ActivClient PIN cache (which leads to additional PIN prompts during the Windows session).
- When selecting a smart card icon in the main screen, the user can enter the PIN and logon successfully, with access to the PIN cache. But there are no sign-in options in the logon screen.

=> Customers can perform smart card authentication. But it may lead to configurations with more PIN prompts (ActivClient PIN cache not active). Also, it does not follow the Windows 8 standard experience.

With ActivClient 7.0.1

On Windows 8, the main logon screen shows 1 icon per user, another icon for “Other user”, and additional icons for smart card certificates (1 per certificate compatible with Windows Logon).

- When selecting the user icon, the user can logon with a password. No Sign-In options available in the logon screen.
- When selecting a smart card icon in the main screen, the user can enter the PIN and logon successfully, with access to the PIN cache. But there are no sign-in options in the logon screen.

=> Guarantees that customers using smart card authentication have access to ActivClient PIN cache for improved user experience. The experience is streamlined, but does not follow the Windows 8 standard experience.

With ActivClient 7.0.2

On Windows 8, the main logon screen shows 1 icon per user, and another icon for “Other user”.

- When selecting the user icon, the user can logon with a password. The user can also access certificates as Sign-In options. If you select a certificate and enter the PIN, you will successfully logon and have access to ActivClient PIN cache – leading to improved user experience during the Windows session.

=> Full compliance with Windows 8 design. You can change the authentication method at logon time, and you have access to ActivClient PIN cache.

Note: in all options, if third party software is installed that adds other credential providers, then more sign-in options will appear.

Article #1643

Article ID: 1643

Item Types: ActivClient

Type: Article

Classification: Configuration

Created: 12/17/12 18:07

Modified: 12/18/12 11:26

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