THE SOUTHERN UNION CONFERENCE

Private cloud and disaster recovery simplified with EMC VNXe unified storage

ESSENTIALS

Challenges
- Running out of storage capacity to match growth
- Obstacles to delivering private cloud

Solutions
- Unified Storage Infrastructure
- EMC VNXe unified storage
- EMC Unisphere management software
- VMware vSphere virtualization solution

Key benefits
- Enabling 99 percent virtualization and adoption of private cloud
- Removal of performance bottlenecks
- Streamlined disaster recovery
- Increased agility with improved provisioning and IT efficiency

The Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is part of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Located in Atlanta, Georgia, the organization is headquarters for the church's conferences across the Southeastern U.S.

IT is among the resources that the Southern Union provides for offices in eight states, which serve churches, schools, healthcare systems, and three universities.

"We've been rapidly growing and the current storage solution wasn't able to keep up. One challenge was that we were running out of space. Another was that performance was getting hit," says Todd Mace, Information Systems director for the Southern Union.

"We also weren't able to do disaster recovery because we didn't have offsite replication. And there was no centralized management for all the storage," he adds. "Grappling with these things made us start looking at other products."

As a non-profit with a limited IT staff, the cost and complexity of a new solution were big concerns. The Southern Union recently chose EMC® VNXe® unified storage to meet challenges standing between the organization and its IT goals, which include rolling out a flexible and efficient private cloud.

"VNXe brought everything to the table in one efficient package and solves all those bottlenecks and problems we've been having," says Mace.

LEAPING FORWARD WITH EMC UNIFIED STORAGE EFFICIENCY

NetApp and other vendors hoped to replace the Cybernetics storage infrastructure that the Southern Union had outgrown. NetApp was the final contender when EMC proposed VNXe unified storage.

Mace recalls, "EMC was a leap forward. We saw things in VNXe that NetApp wasn't able to do, and VNXe was a lot more affordable. VNXe was also light years ahead of NetApp in terms of easy management."

The Southern Union is completing deployment of two VNXe3100™ systems that will host tier-one applications for the conference's eight offices. Because VNXe comes optimized for VMware® vSphere™, the solution lets the organization comfortably virtualize Microsoft Exchange 2010, SQL Server, Dynamics, and custom-built accounting applications.

EMC VNXe unified storage includes storage replication and data deduplication that will give the organization offsite disaster recovery for the first time. EMC Unisphere™ management software, also part of the VNXe solution, provides a central interface that will make storage provisioning and management much easier.

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CONFIDENCE IN PRIVATE CLOUD

With a storage infrastructure that will be 100 percent EMC, the IT department is moving ahead to deliver more services via private cloud.

> "We could piece together different building blocks, but having VMware on top of the VNXe has made it really simple to go to a private cloud."

TODD MACE
INFORMATION SYSTEMS DIRECTOR

He reports that the organization's IT infrastructure is 95 percent virtualized on VMware. The VNXe solution will break a storage performance bottleneck that kept the organization from reaching 99 percent virtualization.

"Having the VNXe platform in place will be empowering. Our ministries will be able to access anything they need to do their jobs effectively within our church," says Mace. "We already centrally host and provide email and accounting services for eight distributed offices. Private cloud will make all of their applications, data, and their ministry materials accessible anywhere, on any device, and now we have the infrastructure to make this possible. It's a major step toward delivering IT as a Service."

BUILT-IN DISASTER RECOVERY

As the Southern Union continues its journey to the cloud, disaster recovery is a major requirement. The IT department has to be confident of meeting internal service-level agreements (SLAs) for 99.9 percent uptime.

"It's critical to have our in-house accounting application always ready to go. If something happens we can easily fail over to another site," he continues. "Another facet is that we host Microsoft Exchange email for our offices. Having VNXe in combination with our VMware infrastructure makes it a lot simpler to deliver a fault-tolerant and high-performance Exchange environment."

Before, remote replication, snapshots and data deduplication were out of reach. "You see disaster recovery capabilities in more expensive enterprise products, but VNXe brings them to a place that is very easy to manage and cost-effective," Mace says. "EMC is the only one to have these features at a small-business level."

A "PERFECT SOLUTION" FOR SIMPLER MANAGEMENT

Mace says that ease of management makes VNXe "a perfect solution" for the organization's small IT staff. The IT team is impressed with the VNXe solution's wizards for Microsoft Exchange and VMware.

"Management is wizard-driven and visual," Mace explains. "There's consistency that saves us time in provisioning storage and setting up additional Exchange databases. And as a VMware customer, we like that VNXe is well-integrated with the VMware APIs. We have a lot more agility in responding to new requirements."

In addition, the old storage environment lacked alerting and central management. The only way to investigate a problem was by logging into the system from the data center.

That issue is gone with VNXe and its Unisphere management interface. Now Mace and the team have one place to perform all their storage management tasks. "On the VNXe, we can centrally view all that alerting from any location. So if we get an alert in the middle of the night, we can manage it remotely without getting out of bed and going to the data center."

READY FOR THE FUTURE

With its private cloud in place, the Southern Union is looking toward the future. The organization wants to use its VNX-based infrastructure to offer virtual desktops to users in its remote offices.

"Management and agility are probably the biggest things with VDI (virtual desktop integration). We'll be able to provision secure virtual desktops very quickly and automate maintenance and other activities," comments Mace. "This is the next step in our cloud journey and we're looking forward to being on the forefront of this with other enterprise-class companies."

Mace concludes, "With EMC unified storage and VMware as the foundation of our private cloud strategy, we can be a non-profit at the forefront of where enterprises want to go."

CONTACT US

To learn more about how EMC products, services, and solutions can help solve your business and IT challenges, contact your local representative or authorized reseller, or visit us online at www.EMC.com.

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