OmegaFi

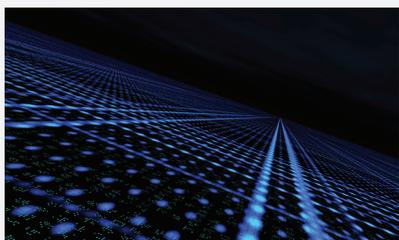## EMC VNX unified storage boosts performance of virtualized file and web servers and automates data replication for disaster recovery

BUSINESS OVERVIEW

At colleges and universities across the U.S., Omega Financial, Inc. (OmegaFi) provides thousands of fraternities and sororities with online solutions, consulting, and staffing support for managing their financial, fundraising, and communications projects.

Growing consistently since 1992, the Columbus, Georgia-based company recently expanded its business model to include in-house data storage for the national fraternities and sororities it serves. This additional demand required increased performance from OmegaFi's information infrastructure and a revised disaster recovery plan to protect its customers' assets.

"With the significant increase in member records, we needed more robust file handling services in order to smoothly process greater data volumes," says George Elliston, OmegaFi's network administrator. "Data protection was also a key factor in deciding to select EMC as a product solution and a partner."

VERSATILE PLATFORM FOR FILE SERVERS, APPLICATIONS, AND DISASTER RECOVERY

After considering NetApp, OmegaFi chose EMC® VNX® unified storage with replication technologies to meet its requirements for performance and disaster recovery, as well as for consolidating its file and application data on a single storage platform.

"We compared the EMC VNX and NetApp offerings box to box," recalls Elliston. "The VNX was definitely in a different league than the FAS2040 as far as its expandability and feature set. Service was also a strong consideration point, and with their local presence, EMC has proven to be very helpful in the 'after sales' support area."

Elliston explains, "One day, my EMC rep called to see how we were doing with the new system. When I said I had just initiated a service request, he immediately came by, got an engineer on WebEx, and the issue was resolved that afternoon. That's the difference with EMC."

The company has moved all of its Microsoft® Windows® file servers to the VNX as CIFS file shares, and its web servers run on the VNX in NFS. All block data—including Microsoft SQL Server® databases used for internal test and development—is stored on VNX SAS drives.

OmegaFi employs Citrix XenServer to virtualize its Windows file servers on the VNX, as well as 25 virtual machines running Red Hat Linux and SQL Server applications on two IBM servers at the front end of the VNX.

"I love that we have both our file and block storage consolidated on the VNX," notes Elliston. "It's much easier to manage and grow."

The company is using EMC RecoverPoint, part of the VNX Remote Protection Suite, to protect its physical and virtual CIFS, NFS, and block data with continuous replication from one VNX in OmegaFi's Columbus data center to a second VNX at a recovery site 110 miles away in Atlanta.

BOOSTING FILE ACCESS PERFORMANCE BY 10 TIMES

Since moving its file and web servers to the VNX, OmegaFi has seen a dramatic increase in performance.

"Our users say that everything runs 10 times faster on the VNX than it did on the stand-alone file servers," reports Elliston. "We have several executives who work remotely and pull files across the network, and they've been raving about how much faster the performance is now."

Elliston adds, "With our growth, we'll need more web servers in the very near future. The VNX allows us to scale easily and increase capacity whenever needed without worrying about degrading system performance."

ENSURING DATA PROTECTION WITH FAST, RELIABLE, REMOTE REPLICATION

Elliston is also very impressed with the replication performance and reliability of the VNX platform and RecoverPoint.

"It's incredible how fast the VNX and RecoverPoint are at moving a ton of data over a one-gig link," says Elliston. "If we ever had to start up a web server from our disaster recovery facility, all we'd do is mount the NFS shares because our entire code base is already there thanks to the replication being continuous. The VNX just works. It's definitely more beneficial and reliable than any solution I've ever used."

OmegaFi has not needed to perform a full recovery due to a disaster, but in testing individual databases, the VNX platform and RecoverPoint have proven to be fast and reliable. For example, OmegaFi restored two 60-70 gigabyte databases to a test server in about five minutes. The IT team anticipates recovery would be equally fast or at least as fast in production.

IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY WITH HANDS-OFF ADMINISTRATION

Using EMC Unisphere™ to manage the VNX, Elliston can easily respond to the business by provisioning new storage in minutes, tune the system, or gain an instant view of how the entire environment is performing. But for the most part, he says, the system manages itself.

"With the VNX, once everything is set up, I don't have to think about it, so it really helps my productivity," he adds. "Unlike the stand-alone file servers we were using, we don't have to patch the VNX or reboot it. It backs up itself. There's not really any hands-on management to speak of. I've now got much more time to spend on virtualization projects and other more strategic work. I don't how I managed before without it."

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