

Case Study



INDUSTRY

Commercial software development

LOCATION

Sarasota, Florida

SOLUTION

VMware and dual protocol (NAS/CIFS and SAN/iSCSI) consolidated storage from NetApp in conjunction with NetApp local and remote backup and replication software

DATALINK SERVICES

- Analysis
- Design
- Implementation
- Support

BENEFITS

- Reduced local server count from 20 to five, shrinking power and air conditioning costs
- Improved performance of test and development databases
- Improved availability and disaster recovery with local and remote disk-based recovery and replication
- Gained an additional revenue stream with software as a service from the remote site

Tropics Software shrinks server footprint and bolsters disaster recovery with Datalink.

THE CUSTOMER: TROPICS SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGIES

Sarasota-based Tropics Software Technologies offers advanced workers' compensation software to a specialized niche of clients located throughout the U.S., including benefits administrators and insurance companies. Based on past experience with Tropics Software, the firm's key clients have come to expect well-tested, dependable software that readily reflects the unique configurations of their environments.

THE CHALLENGE: REGAIN SPACE AND IMPROVE BACKUP AND RECOVERY

Unfortunately, the need to replicate, test, and support most customer configurations with different versions of the company's Oracle®-backed software had begun to pose a challenge to Tropics Software's growing IT infrastructure. After adding multiple servers to the firm's data closet, Web and Systems Administrator Paul Troyer soon found the closet bursting at the seams. It wasn't long before the firm's 20-plus servers had spread onto the desks and floors of adjacent cubicles.

Troyer recognized that there had to be a better way to maximize space and reduce the costs of maintaining so many servers. After hearing how Datalink helped solve data center issues plaguing one of the company's clients, Troyer turned to Datalink for its expertise

designing sound strategies, deploying fully integrated technologies, and providing ongoing support. He hoped Datalink could help him come up with a more comprehensive approach to data protection.

As he recalls, the first few meetings with Datalink were extremely effective. "The Datalink team was personable, very knowledgeable, and able to explain the technology at the basic level we were at," said Troyer. "They didn't try to sell us a solution on the first day. There was no high pressure. They just came in without a preconceived notion and looked at what we had."

THE SOLUTION: VIRTUALIZE SERVERS WITH VMWARE® AND NETAPP® STORAGE

After assessing the situation, Datalink offered several options for Troyer and his team to consider. The most highly recommended was virtualizing the existing servers via VMware Virtual Infrastructure. Datalink also recommended backing VMware with reliable network storage from NetApp so the organization could benefit from near-instant, disk-based snapshots of data, while also setting the stage for remote replication of virtual servers via NetApp SnapMirror™.

While Datalink gave Troyer multiple options, he readily admits it wasn't hard to see the value in Datalink's top recommendation: "It didn't take a whole lot of convincing once we saw the solution. It was very eye-opening.

Making IT happen

A complete data center solutions and services provider, Datalink helps Fortune 500 and mid-tier enterprises get the most from every IT investment – with storage, server, and network expertise across the infrastructure. We deliver greater business results throughout, designing what we sell, deploying what we design, and supporting what we deliver.

Almost like when you hear angels singing. We just knew that's what we needed – both VMware and NetApp."

When it came time to implement the solution, Troyer admits it couldn't have worked more flawlessly. "It was a totally relaxing, very stress-free experience. Our Datalink engineer has continually demonstrated his proficiency. He comes onsite, we do whatever we need to do, it works, and then we go home," he said, recalling his initial concern about switching over the firm's most critical database. "I was really terrified. We started with a database server that we wanted to use as our first VMware ESX server and needed to get our critical database off first and virtualize it. Datalink was very reassuring throughout the process. We did the transition in an evening and were out in just five hours."

THE BENEFITS: REDUCED IT FOOTPRINT, FASTER DISASTER RECOVERY, AND NEW REVENUE

Trusting Datalink's expertise to implement and subsequently support the solution gave Troyer added confidence in his decision. He has since reported many benefits from the move to VMware and NetApp.

Reduction in local server count from 20 to five

Instead of dealing with awkward server management and updates, not to mention the server sprawl he was accustomed to, Troyer now monitors just two ultra-fast VMware ESX Server nodes, which house roughly 20 virtual machines between them, along with a backup domain controller, terminal server, and backup server. Another benefit of NetApp storage is improved reliability and minimal server downtime that could impact ongoing operations, development, and testing. Performance for development and test teams is also much faster on the more powerful servers.

Better disaster recovery with local and remote disk-based backup and replication

At Datalink's recommendation, Troyer also deployed another VMware ESX Server at a regional remote site and has plans in place to use NetApp SnapMirror to replicate virtual machine data from Sarasota. For now, however, Troyer is thrilled with his ability to take quick, multi-hour, local snapshots of important data using NetApp snapshot technology. He also looks forward to the next phase of his deployment with VMware HA and vMotion™, which will provide less disruptive data migration.

New revenue stream that offers software as a service

One pleasant and unexpected outcome of the remote VMware environment was a new revenue stream for Tropics Software. Instead of just using the site for replication and disaster recovery, Datalink and Troyer looked at other ways the remote platform might be used. After hearing some of Tropics Software's potential customers ask about their ability to use the firm's software online without having to install it themselves, Troyer deployed a software-as-a-service model with several remote virtual machines now used by customers who simply log on to Tropics Software's network. Troyer said, "That was a bonus we hadn't thought of before. We used to turn the smaller hosting business away because we didn't have a low-end enough solution for them. Now we do."

THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE: GUIDANCE FROM A KNOWLEDGEABLE, EXPERIENCED IT PARTNER

As Troyer looks toward the future growth planned for his company's information storage infrastructure, with remote replication and greater use of VMware features, he'll continue to call on Datalink. "I wouldn't even think about moving ahead without Datalink," he said. ■