Insurance Brokerage Uses Nutanix for VDI rollout to Migrate to Windows 7 with Repurposed PCs

Business Challenge

As the DeWitt IT organization began looking at options to support remote employees, cost and performance were big concerns for them. Initially, VDI was not even a consideration due to the infrastructure cost implication. The team was considering investing in an 8-10U Fibre Channel SAN with two hosts and 15TB data storage. The team gauged that this infrastructure would not have been feasible to support VDI because of performance issues from the shared Fibre Channel switches, limited redundancy and long ROI for the capital investment. Reproducing its existing production infrastructure to support VDI was too cost-prohibitive, estimated at $150,000 with only minimal redundancy.

The Nutanix Solution

When the team was introduced to the Nutanix solution, it realized that the solution would offer an all-in-one VDI solution that wouldn't require the big capital investment it had originally calculated. In fact, the Nutanix solution would end up costing nearly half of the comparable configuration of 4 servers, FC SAN capacity and networking that DeWitt Stern would have had to purchase. When Emmel chose the compact 2U, 4-node Nutanix Complete Cluster block configuration instead of the big 8-10U SAN he'd been considering, he recalled, "It was all fingers crossed when we started rolling out to our end users. What surprised us is that we're actually getting feedback saying, 'Wow it's so much better than my previous computer and it's faster and more reliable.'"

> "When we started working with Nutanix, my immediate concern was how a small 2U box would do everything we needed it to. I knew there was going to be a lot of load in our network and wasn't sure how the virtual desktop user experience would be, but we got the best feedback possible, because users feel like it's exactly like their local desktop. Nutanix performs really well for VDI, so much so that I'm looking to refresh our server production environment as well."
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> — Peter Emmel, Assistant Vice President, DeWitt Stern Group, Inc.

For the clients, DeWitt Stern repurposed the existing three year old workstations with a Windows 7-embedded thin OS, ThinDesktop for locking down access to this OS, and the VMware View Client. "The single Nutanix box provides all the compute, storage and networking required for the virtual desktops. All the performance management is done in the background and we've got plenty of IOPS to spare for future desktops we may need," explained Emmel. The plans are for 100 users on a single, 4-node Nutanix box for the time being, with the addition of laptop users in the near future.

Feedback from employees has been all positive, with many commenting on not being able to notice a difference working remotely. Upgrading to Windows 7 was also a definite advantage for users. And because users were able to keep their old workstations, DeWitt Stern's hardware refresh period increased from three years to six or more, enabling ongoing cost savings.

DeWitt Stern

WHAT WAS NEEDED

▸ Scalable Virtual Desktop deployment to migrate company PCs to Windows 7 and prolong the lifecycle of existing client hardware.

WHAT WAS DEPLOYED

▸ Nutanix Complete Cluster with VMware View.

HOW DEWITT STERN BENEFITED

▸ Fast and easy migration to Windows 7.

▸ Centralized management of virtualized applications using VMware ThinApp resulting in easier ongoing maintenance.

▸ Improved desktop user experience: faster and more reliable with little to no user-downtime.

▸ Users can now access their desktop from any device that contains the VMware View Client.

▸ Cost savings as a result of the SAN-Free architecture supported by the Nutanix solution.

NUTANIX

VDI Management and Setup

With Nutanix, virtual desktop deployment proved to be quick and simple. The IT team did not have to configure a separate storage environment, nor connect it up to the hosts since compute and storage are converged in the Nutanix Cluster. The initial gold Windows 7 desktop image was provisioned in 15 minutes, with each new machine coming up in 5 minutes or less.

Emmel explained, "Rolling out the Nutanix solution was a very pleasant experience. The support from Nutanix was phenomenal. In the past, with other products, we had to deal with a lot of engineers who didn't know what they were talking about but Nutanix has all the right engineers with deep VMware vSphere and View experience."

Home Users with XenApp

In an additional use case, DeWitt has virtualized Citrix XenApp on the Nutanix Cluster for publishing applications to its home users. Through a VPN, remote users are able to access virtualized applications that the IT team has made available on the XenApp servers. With the same Nutanix hardware hosting the company's virtual desktops, Emmel is able to virtualize his XenApp servers and enable home users to leverage their own client devices to access up-to-date applications without having to worry about impacting the virtual desktops due to the additional performance Nutanix provides.

Summary

The DeWitt IT team is also considering using Nutanix for its server production environment and remote offices at the end of next year because of how well the Nutanix scale-out complete cluster has performed for the VDI and XenApp use cases. In comparing the costeffectiveness and ongoing power and space savings of the Nutanix boxes to traditional solutions, Emmel believes Nutanix will be a natural fit for remote offices that have less space and employees to support. As existing infrastructure hardware at headquarters reaches the end of its lifecycle, Emmel is excited to consider swapping out these servers and mSAN with Nutanix boxes instead.

Using Nutanix enabled DeWitt to virtualize its employees desktops in a cost-effective manner while delivering a great Windows 7 user experience. Moving forward, DeWitt Stern will be able to easily scale and update its IT infrastructure by growing its Nutanix Cluster as its business needs grow, maintaining its edge in the insurance industry.

About DeWitt Stern

DeWitt Stern is a privately-held, New York-based insurance brokerage and risk management firm specializing in entertainment & media, business, personal, employee and fine arts insurance. A forward thinking company, DeWitt prides itself in staying ahead of its competitors through the use of innovative new technologies. For more information please visit **www.dewittstern.com**.

About Nutanix

Nutanix brings forth an exciting new SAN-Free virtualized datacenter platform, converging two tiers of infrastructure down to one. Through the use of innovative server-attached PCIe Flash and high capacity SATA drives, Nutanix' innovative distributed storage and compute cluster localizes the data-path for higher performance and reduced complexity. Inspired by SAN-Free distributed systems employed by Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Twitter, Nutanix is first to market with an enterprise-friendly, easy to deploy storage and compute cluster that dynamically grows to meet business demands. For more information please visit **www.nutanix.com**.

"Nutanix's support of VMware View's single-image method of rolling out desktops enables us to no longer have to worry about people messing up their desktop configurations. It's tremendously helpful to no longer have to deal with the separate client devices of each end user since they act as thin clients to access the same virtual desktop image. Information is protected automatically because it's backed up on the Nutanix cluster. Desktop management is easier for IT and users are more happy with the experience and flexibility of their Windows 7 virtual desktops—it's a great situation."

Peter Emmel
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