GPRC

Grande Prairie Regional College Streamlines Service Delivery with Nutanix

Agile, Manageable Infrastructure Helps College Serve Faculty and Students Faster and Better.

INDUSTRY
Higher Education

BENEFITS
- Flexible hyperconverged infrastructure helped regional college respond to fast-changing curriculum and staff needs

- One-click management via single pane of glass empowered small IT team

- Consolidated solution reduces data center footprint and operational costs

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC) is a comprehensive community institution, publicly supported to provide opportunities in post-secondary education in northwestern Alberta. When its growing network environment from multiple vendors became too much for its small IT to manage, GPRC migrated its VMware environment, servers, and workloads to a hyperconverged infrastructure from Nutanix. Nutanix delivers the high availability the college needs, and lets administrators take advantage of consolidated management, so they can respond to new challenges fast.

> "When curriculum changes, we don't often get a whole lot of notice, and sometimes even partway through the school year, we learn that the program has changed. Before, it was basically impossible to accommodate change requests. With Nutanix, we can easily spin up a new server, test it out, and let a stakeholder know it's good to go."
>
> – Matt Thiessen, IT Systems Manager, Grand Prairie Regional College

SOLUTION
- Nutanix Cloud Platform

- Nutanix AHV Acropolis

- Nutanix Prism management solution

Applications
- VMware VCenter

- Microsoft Xchange

- SQL servers

- File servers

NUTANIX

CHALLENGE

Since 1966, GPRC has served students from a wide area of regions through its highly qualified faculty, affordable tuition, small classes, and extensive scholarship and awards programs. The college relies on its network infrastructure to support its 2,500 students, as well as approximately 700 faculty and staff. However, as its network grew, the small IT team found it difficult to keep its complex multi-vendor environment running at its best.

"I was the only full-time server administrator," said Matt Thiessen, IT Systems Manager at Grand Prairie Regional College. "We were working with Microsoft Xchange, SQL, file servers, and backup servers. When you consider that we also had to manage a SAN in a VMware iSCSI environment on top of that, it just became too much. We had to find ways to be more effective with our time."

The GPRC network provided adequate performance, but it could not scale easily to address changing needs, and required a great deal of time and effort to maintain. The college was looking for a platform that could help simplify its environment and deliver the agility that faculty and students required.

SOLUTION

Nutanix Enterprise Cloud lets GPRC support its 110 servers with multiple workloads and applications on one comprehensive platform. "We currently are using Nutanix for our VMware environment which supports the vast majority of our servers and applications," said Thiessen. "We have everything from terminal servers that we use for labs and staff, to in-house and instructional applications, to productivity tools like QuickBooks. We have also added a second cluster we use for disaster recovery at another campus, in case of failure or interruption."

Highly scalable and flexible, Nutanix empowers GPRC to quickly roll out new network services as soon as faculty or staff require them. "Our business development team has grown from two or three virtual servers to 20," said Thiessen. "They use lots of test environments to make sure their solutions are working before they roll them out, and are often working with student records and financial data. With Nutanix and VMware, we feel comfortable spinning up a new server every time a new application shows up. We can run a lot of dedicated small servers to support different workloads."

The college is also using the Nutanix AHV enterprise-ready hypervisor to support select virtual server environments, while keeping costs in check. "We use Nutanix AHV and Nutanix Prism to run a four-node cluster with 16 virtual servers that we are testing," said Thiessen. "Nutanix AHV has saved us the expense of having to deploy VMware VSphere and its license."

RESULTS

Migrating multiple network devices and components to one easy-to-manage platform has freed the college's IT team from cumbersome manual tasks, and provided consistent, trouble-free operation. "We don't have any storage specialists on the team, and Nutanix is very simple to use on a day to day basis," said Thiessen. "Most days we don't need to check on it or work on it. When an issue does come up, Nutanix support has been phenomenal in resolving any problems we encounter."

NUTANIX™

The solution has also enabled GPRC to save money on IT resources, and enabled the team to focus on more important priorities to support its staff and students. "Nutanix has basically saved us from having to hire an extra person," said Thiessen. "With Nutanix, I no longer need to juggle four different storage environments with their own individual tools and interfaces. Moving to a hyperconverged infrastructure on Nutanix definitely freed up our time to work on other projects."

Nutanix also enables GPRC to reduce the physical size of its data center, to help keep operational expenses in check. "Running Nutanix, our environment is about half the size it would be if we had separate storage components," said Thiessen.

NEXT STEPS

With Nutanix in place, the GPRC IT group has gained peace of mind in knowing that its infrastructure will be running smoothly all day, every day. "We have gone as long as three months without logging onto Prism on Nutanix," said Thiessen. "You set it up and it just runs. Then when we go to fix a problem, we'll notice that it has been months since we've looked at it."

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