AMBROSE UNIVERSITY

Ambrose University Enables Remote Working for Faculty and Staff with Nutanix

Calgary University Streamlines Management with Scalable Hyperconverged Infrastructure

BUSINESS BENEFITS

With more than 920 students, Ambrose University is a faith-based institution that is committed to the quest for knowledge, wisdom, virtue, and service. In addition to training leaders for ministry, Ambrose University offers accredited degrees in arts and science, education, and business. When its existing environment began to show its age, its IT team migrated its administrative operations to a Nutanix hyperconverged infrastructure. This flexible platform simplified management and enabled the University to scale out its remote work capabilities in just days, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now IT administrators can spend less time provisioning and updating network resources, and more time focusing on improving the experience of faculty, staff, and students.

"When we needed to expand our remote desktop environment, we already had the critical building blocks in place," said Steve Morris, Director of Information Technology at Ambrose University. "We simply had to spin up more gateway servers and add applications, and we can easily do that with Nutanix—it's not a big deal for us."

CHALLENGE

Ambrose University was formed in 2007 when Alliance University College and Nazarene University College joined together to provide new and stronger academic programming to a broader public. In 2008, the University moved to a 40-acre campus to accommodate more students in its growing program offerings. Its network infrastructure supports its Learning Management System

INDUSTRY
Higher Education

BENEFITS
- Provided flexibility to switch employees to remote work during COVID-19 pandemic

- Simplified management to enable small staff of three to support 1300 users

- Enabled dependable operation for three years with no loss of service to customers

SOLUTION
- Nutanix Enterprise Cloud

- Nutanix AHV hypervisor

- Nutanix Prism Pro management solution

- Veeam backup

Applications
- Learning Management System (LMS) applications

- Open source PBX

- Microsoft Office 365 productivity applications

- Microsoft SQL databases

(LMS), Microsoft Office 365 productivity applications, web servers, and internal databases. As its existing on-premises environment with separate storage and compute components approached end of life, the University's IT administrators decided the time was right to consolidate operations. The team was looking for a technology solution that was cost- effective, flexible, and simple to manage.

"We have a very small IT shop, with just three of us to support and maintain a user base of 1300," said Morris. "We were tired of switching between different consoles to manage different devices, and we wanted a solution that would be very easy to use."

SOLUTION

After considering several solutions, Ambrose migrated its Dell hardware environment running Microsoft Hyper-V to a Nutanix hyperconverged infrastructure with Nutanix AHV.

"What really attracted us about Nutanix was that it was cost effective compared to the Dell solution," said Morris. "Also, the local Nutanix team here in Calgary are top-notch, and they could show us use cases in education that we could actually evaluate. Best of all, it was easy to manage and use with Nutanix Prism. I can jump in and create a new VM in just a few minutes. I like to joke that it's simple enough that even a Director of IT can figure out how to use it."

A cluster running on the Nutanix NX-6000 Series Virtual Computing Platform enables Ambrose to support all its administrative compute needs. To assist with some of the migration, Morris and his team used an early release of Nutanix Move, a cross-hypervisor migration solution that enables VM migration with minimal downtime. The solution also delivers the integrated security that Ambrose needs to protect sensitive student and university data.

"One of the things that attracted us to Nutanix is its built-in security between VMs," said Morris. "It lets us delineate policies that define which VMs can talk to each other. We approach our security in layers, and Nutanix fits nicely into this model."

RESULTS

Morris deployed the Nutanix solution with scalability and flexibility in mind, and the new infrastructure was truly put to the test when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in March, 2020. Over just a few days, the IT team had to act fast to migrate many of its employees to remote work-from-home environments.

"In less than a week, we went from having three or four remote workers to more than 70," said Morris. "We made sure we had the right licensing, expanded our remote desktop gateways, and brought up our application servers. In a few days we expanded the environment and were able to support everyone utilizing Microsoft Remote Desktop. Our users don't really see a difference between the desktop and remote application. Administrators have access to all the tools they need, and our students are leaning heavily on the LMS, but we don't experience any hiccups whatsoever, because I can easily add more memory, disk spaces, or other resources as needed."

To help maintain the integrity of the University's data, Ambrose also migrated to the Veeam Backup and Replication solution. "About a month after our purchase, Veeam announced full support for all Nutanix technologies," said Morris. "We have gone from a backup solution using Microsoft Hyper-V and Symantec, and the difference has been like night and day in terms of performance and ease of use."

NEXT STEPS

After completing migration to Nutanix and successfully addressing immediate pandemic challenges, Morris plans to step back and consider how to expand his infrastructure in the future. One option under consideration is Nutanix, Frame, a Desktop-as-a-Service (DaaS) solution that lets users access apps on any device and from any location.

"Virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) support is one capability we are looking at down the road," said Morris. "The great thing about the solution is that if someone says, 'it would be great if we could do this,' we have plenty of possibilities for new services."

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