Aso College Group Creates an Agile Server Environment Using Nutanix Files

Nutanix helps Aso Group maintain its file server environment with flexibility and ease of management

INDUSTRY
Higher Education

CHALLENGES
- Frequent performance problems with existing blade servers
- Excessive workload required for running backup and restore procedures
- Inability to run new apps due to environmental limitations
- Limited scalability

BUSINESS BENEFITS
- Decreased workload on system administrators and enables efficient operation
- Increased scalability and minimized system downtime
- Eliminated the risk of incorrect system restore procedures
- Obtained the ability to monitor system operations with one glance

SOLUTION
Nutanix Enterprise Cloud Platform
- Acropolis Software, including built-in hypervisor, AHV
- Prism management plane
- Nutanix Files

"With Nutanix and its superior scalability, not only can we easily scale by adding nodes, we figured we could also minimize system downtime."

– Shin Yokoyama, Business Strategy Group, Corporate Management Department, Aso Juku Educational Foundation

"With Nutanix and its Self-Service Restore feature, the restore process that had previously taken about 3 hours can now be done in less than 5 minutes. So I looked forward to the administrative workload being reduced significantly."

– Yumi Sasano, Business Strategy Group, Corporate Management Department, Aso Juku Educational Foundation

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CHALLENGES

Aso College Group consists of 13 vocational schools located in Japan's Fukuoka prefecture. As a general vocational school, it offers a wide range of specialized fields, including IT, tourism, language, public affairs, healthcare, social welfare, design, game, beauty, architecture, automobile technologies, and more. The Group's aim is to train students to become immediately employable upon graduation.

Aso Group was relying on a collection of aging information systems, including web servers for external use, DNS, and AD environments on blade servers. However, infrastructure problems began occurring frequently with the blade servers, and its maintainability worsened. As a result, this created more burden for the Group's system administrators, and there were also issues with scalability.

"We were not able to run a new OS due to limitations with the blade server, and we were forced to set up a separate server to deploy new programs, such as for electronic internal memos. The restore procedures that were required when a problem arose took a lot of time and effort, so reducing our operational workload was also an issue. Because we were using a single blade as our file server, we had difficulty with flexible scaling, and we were also facing limitations in terms of capacity," reflected Shin Yokoyama, Business Strategy Group Leader of the Corporate Management Department.

SOLUTION

In addition to dealing with the increasing infrastructure issues, the scheduled time for updating the blade server environment had arrived, so the company considered deploying Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS. "Not only is scalability poor in a 3-tier configuration, servers must be set up externally and operated in a way similar to a conventional backup environment. In contrast, with the highly scalable Nutanix platform, not only could we expand easily by adding nodes, we figured we could also minimize downtime," noted Yokoyama.

Yokoyama also appreciated the fact that the backup environment for business continuity could be operated simply with Nutanix. Previously, third-party software was used with a server located externally, with data ultimately saved on tape media. "With the Nutanix Self-Service Restore function, we can now complete the restore process in under 5 minutes, something that previously took about 3 hours. So we looked forward to significantly reducing the administrative workload," said Yumi Sasano, also of the Business Strategy Group.

The ease of use of Nutanix Prism for operations and management was another well regarded feature. "It is easy to intuitively understand information, so you can immediately discern the health of the system, and we figured we could reduce the administrative workload," said Yokoyama.

For this project, Ricoh Japan Corporation assisted with everything from project proposal to deployment and operational support. Tetsuya Nakamura of Ricoh, who has been involved since the initial project proposal, said, "Nutanix supports flexible settings, so it can be operated stably without any downtime. Thanks to Nutanix, we were able to address our client's issues."

Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS was chosen because of its ability to decrease the workload on system administrators and for its high scalability.

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CUSTOMER OUTCOME

Aso Group deployed three Nutanix NX Series nodes in its main datacenter for the production environment and an additional node in a separate rack for the backup environment. In general, the IT applications and public web server are run on Nutanix. "If the entire environment can be migrated, there is no question that it will greatly reduce the operational management workload, including backups," acknowledged Sasano.

Nutanix Files was used for the installation, with part of the cluster storage utilized as a file server. "Because there is also flexible support for increased capacity on the user side, we are able to run a file server while taking advantage of the easily scalable Nutanix platform," said Yokoyama. Nutanix Files is included with the Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS right from the start, and it can be used by simply purchasing an additional license.

Sasano uses Prism to confirm the health of the Nutanix cluster. "Because you can immediately discern the system status by looking at just a single screen, it's easy to use on a daily basis. The heart display tells us everything we need to know," said Sasano glowingly.

One of the big features they are looking forward to is the ability to scale the system without any downtime when the time comes to upgrade. "We think it is truly fantastic that the system can continue operating without any downtime, and we are looking forward to the next upgrade coming as soon as possible within five years," said Yokoyama. He explains that because the system can be upgraded by simply replacing nodes, one of the appealing features of the system is the ability to upgrade gradually without the need to secure a large budget for a given year.

NEXT STEPS

Aso Group now plans to integrate the remaining file servers at its sister schools into the current Nutanix environment. In addition, Yokoyama says that they would like to construct a backup environment at a separate location to fortify their BCP capabilities. "Moving forward, we would like for new servers and services to be run on Nutanix as much as possible. Personally, I am also interested in Nutanix AHV as a hypervisor," added Yokoyama.

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