SMART drives huge performance, cost and resource utilisation gains with Nutanix

Managed service provider reduces backup times by 70% and has decreased the demands on resource time by 60% allowing it to better deliver on customer SLAs

Delivering managed services in the cloud is no small feat when merging infrastructure, managing customer environments, maintaining an always on environment and looking to grow a business in an industry where consumer assumption is that of continually reducing price points.

When faced with a slowdown in its infrastructure and the need to be more flexible and agile in its overall cloud approach and service delivery, SMART Technology identified Nutanix as a technology partner that met the requirement stack. Its mandate? A technology that could work within its existing environment, consolidate and replace its legacy systems, increase performance of its cloud server environment within reason of the same hardware foundation, and at the same time provide a single, intuitive management pane for both internal support teams and Customers.

SMART Technology is a Managed Service Provider (MSP), providing a multitude of services ranging from fibre connectivity, cloud, security and professional services. Operating since 2006, the company has enjoyed consistent growth due to a business model that focuses on excellent customer service, satisfaction and experience, while delivering highly tailored and customised services to clients, some of which it still maintains since inception. Based in Johannesburg, Gauteng, it currently hosts infrastructure at various modular nodes and within the Teraco facilities in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, a distributed model for better resilience.

COMPANY
Founded in 2006, SMART Technology is a managed service provider delivering customised solutions across the ICT value chain. Based in Gauteng, it has remote redundant sites in Durban and Cape Town.

INDUSTRY
ICT

BUSINESS NEEDS
SMART Technology had to improve manageability, uptime, and speeds to customers while overcoming the complexity of running multiple virtualisation technologies.

SOLUTION
- Nutanix AHV
- HP DL380 G9 servers
- Mellanox switches

BENEFITS
- Single pane management interface
- A 3:1 optimisation rate in hardware
- Reduction in power usage
- Backup times reduced by 70%
- Resource time demands down by 60%

CHALLENGE

As a private cloud provider, SMART Technology remains at the forefront of innovation, a business culture, and was looking for ways to optimise its infrastructure footprint. The end goal was to see how the company could further increase efficiencies, experience and always on, to customers when accessing services, from cloud servers to SaaS. The company also needed to more effectively manage the complexity of running multiple virtualisation vendor stacks, and simply was not getting enough insights and visibility into the manageability and performance of its systems. "We needed a simpler, better way to do more with less. One of the most frequent complaints from both Customers and our own people, was performance, and the only way to resolve that time and again was throwing money at hardware, which was not a viable model in this industry." says Linda Morris, Director of Smart Technology.

Given the nature of its business, SMART likewise had to find a solution that could assist in reducing its power consumption, vertical real estate footprint, while still providing customers with scalability as their need to move workloads into the cloud increased. Furthermore, the platform needed to provide the business with a single, user-friendly, management pane.

"We wanted to drive efficiency with a faster rate of customer provisioning and onboarding, but, be confident our foundations would continue to meet performance expectations – both speed and resiliency. This meant time spent on resource intensive administration tasks had to be reduced. As part of this, we had to gain more visibility into our forecasting and budgeting for a smooth hardware scale out. We were also looking for new ways to increase our storage and server workload capacity in the organisation, there had to be a better way," says Linda Morris, Director SMART Technology.

The company had a quandary, how could it increase overall capacity for maximum efficiency, while at the same time increasing redundancy on its existing virtualization vendor system resources, beyond the traditional models, but still remaining competitive and viable. Furthermore, whatever technology it selected couldn't be insular, it had to support the majority of O/S's available in the market, and offer a seamless migration path.

SOLUTION

The business had previously considered hyperconvergence a few years prior and an alternate vendor, but it wasn't viable for a service provider model, it was just too capital intensive and Smart would not be competitive in the cloud service provider market.

After hearing about Nutanix from an existing Customer on its FTTH stack, the company decided to again consider a hyperconverged infrastructure, and again stacked out multiple offerings before it settled on Nutanix to replace its legacy environment and effectively plug into the company's server infrastructure.

Not only did Nutanix meet the price point, there was an excellent reference, being the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

"We were aware of Nutanix through industry news, as well as being a leader in the Gartner Quadrant for its stack. Our technical team had actively identified the solution as an on-trend opportunity to be considered and the business leadership was also interested in the solution from the start. Using Nutanix would enable us to deliver more with less and stay competitive."

"With customers running multiple O/S vendors for their workloads, we needed a solution that could deal with these requirements, as well as providing all the enhanced features needed in a enterprise cloud environment, but generally all licensed driven. The Nutanix AHV enterprise-ready hypervisor enables us to deliver this. Our team found it easy to deploy, with the initial implementation taking a minimal amount of time to complete," says Morris.

SMART found the implementation of the Nutanix solution much simpler than anticipated, with seamless orchestration of migration and integration of existing software. It was able to deploy with less resources required, in a faster time frame, with ease of migration.

SMART also used the the services of Nutanix in country with the design and implementation of the solution in addition to relying on them for migration, managing the health checks, and the orchestration. It has further signed a three-year integrated support contract with the company.

"The in-country Nutanix team were phenomenal, nothing was too much trouble, it felt like we had worked with them for years, they were sincere, on the game when we needed them, did what they said, and said what they did, it wasn't a sales pitch, it was awesome, a team who were not only highly technically experienced, but understood the Customer experience dynamic for long term longevity", says Morris.

RESULTS

"With its single pane display truly delivering for operations and management via Prism Central, exceptional performance gains through intelligent workload allocation at block level and storage optimization, Nutanix has surpassed our expectations. We have seen a workload reduction on our resources and the workload management has been nothing short of phenomenal, it's easy to use and understand" says Morris.

Today, SMART is running a three node AHV cluster, a total vertical real estate of 6U, a reduction of 8U and 12 physical servers, and approximately 2KW in power loading.

"Our technical teams are spending fewer resources in administrating and maintaining multiple virtual environments and analysing performance bottlenecks. Using Nutanix, we have seamlessly met our SLA objectives, while reducing the overall complexity of the environment. More importantly it is helping us drive down costs and grow our cloud business. Today we have time to grow our cloud business, Nutanix has given us back the one thing money can't buy, time, time to focus on things that can contribute to the bottom line" says Morris.

NEXT STEPS

"Even though it is still early days with our Nutanix implementation, we are already looking at potential additional modules and an additional block. Future operations are moving towards an automated provisioning model. It has also opened additional discussion points with our partners as we have also become a reseller of Nutanix solutions. We are also talking to our Customers who do not want to go cloud about migrating to Nutanix on premise and offering a DR service via our cloud" says Morris.

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