



When There's No Downtime: Finding Your Dream Hyperconvergence Solution

by Joseph Kaplovitz

“Community” might be a buzzword in real estate today, but Kaplan Companies has always been all about building communities. Ensuring a self-sustaining mix of rental and owned residential, as well as commercial property, has been Kaplan’s business model since 1952. By doing so, we can pivot much faster than other development and real estate companies to meet the changing needs of the market.

In the last 15 years, [Kaplan](#) has concentrated more on rentals than ever before. The rental market is so strong, we almost can’t build these units fast enough. But being in the leasing business means you must always be available, and you need the technology that enables that.

Technology has always played some role in real estate. Twenty years ago, most of our technology was basic accounting software, whether that was for leasing or keeping track of invoices for construction. Then came the era of using PalmPilots out in the field to approve purchase orders and invoices. That was when we started seeing technology used in the field. When websites started exploding a decade ago, we moved the leasing side of real estate online, including advertising and payments. Today, everything is done online. In theory, even more could be done without any human interaction—but we want to always give that human touch—most people want to speak to a human when leasing an apartment or discussing their construction needs.

Throughout this evolution, Kaplan’s management has consistently been supportive of new technologies. Michael Kaplan, who took over running the company from his father in the 1970s, is an engineer by training, so he’s always loved technology. The current CEO, Jason Kaplan, is of a generation that appreciates the value of what IT can do for the company. So for a long time, technology has been an integral part of our strategy and our mindset.

Evolving Needs

Kaplan is based in Highland Park, New Jersey, in a head office location that can’t be beat: I literally work in a castle. Merriewold Castle is in the English country manor style, built in 1924 by J. Seward Johnson, of Johnson & Johnson fame. My office is in the former stable. It’s an incredibly cool place to work, though you can imagine the technological challenges of automating a heritage building like this. The rest of the

company is scattered throughout New Jersey with over 30 locations connecting to Home Base.

When I joined Kaplan 15 years ago, one of my first projects was to create a VPN mesh to connect all of our 30+ sites. It was mostly for our leasing offices, but it also connected our maintenance offices, construction trailers, and the like.

Our climate-controlled, secure server room is on the third floor of the "Castle." Back when I started here, there was just one server running Microsoft Small Business. The buzzword back then was "file sharing" and the server also was the database for the backend of the accounting software.

Over the next few years, the number of servers started growing. Eventually, we were using a server for SQL, one for Microsoft Exchange, a file server, and an app server—and we knew that trend of needing more servers was going to continue. At that point, we started looking at virtualization.

It's not sustainable to keep cramming more servers into a secure room. The solution is #virtualization. #NutanixStories

I'm very much a hands-on CIO. I'm not one of those who just likes the management part of it—I love the technology. So when it came to virtualization solutions, I did my research. Back then, there were only two real choices: Microsoft Hyper-V or VMware. Since VMware was the market leader, that's what I chose.

I went out and got VMware certified, we purchased an EqualLogic array, and then I went about virtualizing all our servers. Right away, we saw an increase in speed and we dropped down from six servers to three. But as anyone reading this will know, things get slower over time, and as the years roll on, things don't always work quite as well as they did at the beginning of their life. Three years later, with 10 virtualized servers running, we moved to a Dell Compellent array. Four years after that it was time for us to look for a new array—or better solution.

A New Market for Solutions

At this point, I started looking into hyperconvergence options. There were three big players, Dell EMC, HPE SimpliVity, and [Nutanix](#). I had considered [Nutanix](#) 10 years ago, when I first looked into moving into virtualization, but back then it was basically just generic software running on generic hardware. I still would have ended up running VMware on the [Nutanix](#) platform, and the pricing on the EqualLogic array was about half of what it would have cost me to go to Nutanix.

Jump forward 10 years, and a lot has changed. Nutanix is a much more mature system now, and has emerged as a market leader. And when I consider all that we get with the solution, it's the best bang for

our buck. There's also the issue of simplicity and support, which was something I was very interested in after my existing experience with virtualization.

Under our previous setup, if I had a problem with my virtualization, I went to VMware. If I ran into an issue with my Dell servers, I went to Dell. If anything came up with my Microsoft servers, I had to go to Microsoft, and so on. So I would call Microsoft, for example, and they would point their finger at VMware, who would then indicate that Dell was the problem, and Dell would point back to Microsoft. It wasn't fun, or in any way efficient. I saw a tremendous advantage in getting off this crazy merry-go-round by moving to a single system that did everything. Then, if anything went wrong, I'd need to go to only one place for support.

Multiple solutions require multiple avenues for support. To simplify, find a single system that does everything. #NutanixStories

When I made the decision to go with Nutanix, the plan was to use VMware as the hypervisor. But with my goal of simplicity, I decided to take a more serious look at Nutanix's native hypervisor, [AHV](#). This was before I even realized how great Nutanix is and what the gains would be. Even though VMware's hypervisor has a lot of features, [AHV](#) is catching up, and I reasoned that the extra bells and whistles probably wouldn't even be necessary with a native system. I decided not only to go with Nutanix, but to give [AHV](#) a shot.

Legendary Support

I designed our Nutanix setup to be the best possible system top to bottom. Once that was done, I wanted to try AHV on one server as a test. That way, I knew that if it didn't work well, we could flip it back. We started with one server on AHV, then two, then three—and soon everything was on AHV. I'd kept our VMware servers running just in case I wanted to restore back to them, but there was no need.

Within two weeks after we'd migrated everything to AHV, everything was running like a dream. There were no hiccups, and the speed was great. I was thrilled to have a system that worked so well, and with so little effort from me. Little did I know how much I would really come to love the Nutanix system, and two years later, I still do.

Nutanix's support is legendary. If something goes wrong, there's no more finger pointing. When I call Nutanix, I get to talk to the people at the top of the service and technical support departments.

The system practically runs itself. Once in a while there might be a popup error, but it's nothing we can't easily remedy. Of course, I'm not letting the system just run by itself all the time because we have to perform upgrades and ensure we have the latest security. Apart from that, however, the system is very

hands off.

Reclaiming My Time

Back in the old days, upgrades were a real headache. Because we're a leasing and construction company, we're open nearly 24/7/365. Construction can start as early as 5:30 in the morning, while leasing might work late into the night. There's really no downtime to work with, except on statutory holidays. For about 10 years, I was the one who stepped in to provide the necessary updates during the periods of time when no one would be impacted.

Don't get me wrong, I knew it was my job to provide our company with the updates required to run smoothly and safely, but for about all that time, I worked countless hours on holidays and weekends. It put a strain on myself, and now, that's no longer necessary.

When we moved to Nutanix, they promised updating would be easy, but it's not even comparable to anything in the past. All I have to do is log into the management console, look for the updates available, click a button and I'm done. If something fails, I call support and they take care of it.

This summer, our region has experienced an extreme heat wave. As a result, we recently had a massive power incident. It's something I always worried would happen sooner or later: our batteries overloaded and everything just shut down. But with our new system, I needn't have worried at all. I turned the batteries back on, and everything immediately came back. I didn't have to troubleshoot a thing.

I still sometimes end up getting those calls after-hours—that just comes with the job—but my life looks completely different than it did before. Even though we're still running nearly 24/7/365, I don't have to be. And it's all because of Nutanix.