

CLUBLINKS



At a glance

Industry

Managed Services / Facilities Management

Solution

VMware virtualisation platform
HP Servers, Switches and Storage
Area Network

Objective

Consolidation and refresh of the IT infrastructure to improve performance and disaster recovery capabilities, while reducing hardware and maintenance costs.

Benefits

- A reliable, faster performing IT infrastructure
- Consolidation of hardware due to virtualisation has reduced maintenance costs
- The project was near cost-neutral
- Recovery time in the event of a disaster has halved

ClubLINKS improves system performance and disaster recovery with virtualisation project

ClubLINKS' origins date back to 2002, when the first company in the Group was incorporated to assist with the establishment of Sanctuary Lakes Resort. A managed services provider, today the ClubLINKS Group range of offerings have grown to include golf management, community administration, business services, telecommunications and private security. Its clients can be found in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

Good information systems are an important enabler for the ClubLINKS business model. Almost a decade ago management envisioned a centralised IT administration function that would provide information systems to support the organisation's various services, facilitate communication between staff, clients, members; ensure strong data security, and provide a platform for continuing growth.

To turn the vision into reality, ClubLINKS began its long partnership with Professional Advantage and over the years,

the two organisations have worked together to deploy a suite of systems including Microsoft Dynamics GP, CRM, Retail Management Solutions and Microsoft SharePoint Server. The relationship hasn't only covered software either; Professional Advantage has provided guidance, design and deployment services to ensure ClubLINKS' physical IT infrastructure is always working at optimal performance.

A refresh brings opportunity

When ClubLINKS was recently faced with a need to upgrade its core IT infrastructure, Professional Advantage consultants suggested it should consider a virtualised IT environment. The change from a traditional clustered Microsoft service to virtual servers would consolidate the number of physical servers required; ensure high availability across all servers; provide greater administrative ease; and the move offered a way to improve the company's disaster recovery capabilities.

Chris Maestrale, ClubLINKS System Administrator, could see the potential so he approached management to discuss both need and benefits. "We'd reached a stage where we had to update our hardware, particularly the SAN [storage area network]. The old SAN was running out of space and



had become expensive to maintain. Professional Advantage did some research and found us a suitable new HP SAN with roughly three times the capacity of the old model, with a three year warranty, making the exercise practically cost-neutral. For management, it was a no-brainer."

Walking a virtual path

Having agreed that a virtual infrastructure was the way to go, ClubLINKS sought competitive quotes from a number of IT services suppliers. "In the end, we chose to stay with Professional Advantage. They knew our network back-to-front, in fact, they designed it. That working knowledge meant they were first cab off the rank. They've always provided us with fantastic service. We find them proficient and professional, and we know they'll do a good job for us," Chris adds.

The refresh involved deploying VMware vSphere as the new platform upon which all virtual servers would run. The number of servers was reduced from nine to four, thus reducing IT costs, and the new SAN was established. To keep costs down, existing equipment was redeployed as part of the new infrastructure wherever possible. A number of ClubLINKS' existing servers were re-used for virtualisation, along with existing storage, fibre channel host bus adapters and switches.

At the same time, new disaster recovery processes were established. Chris says, "We still do our disaster recovery backups onto tape, but now we replicate all virtual servers onto network-attached storage (NAS) using a kind of portable hard drive. This means we can take the virtual server, rather than just the tape, off site. In the past we would have had to do a complete reinstall before being able to access data in the event of a disaster. The difference now is that using the NAS, we just have to clone the system to new hardware. This has cut our disaster recovery time in half"

The introduction of new servers, more processing power and more RAM meant users initially noticed a performance increase, although the greater system speed has now become

standard and is largely unremarked upon in day to day activity. Other benefits of the upgrade include high availability services across all servers and the ability to clone the organisation's production environment into a test environment when running test updates.

"We can deploy servers much more easily," Chris notes. "In the past we would have had to get a quote for the hardware and licenses, server installation and configuration of software. It would take up to ten days to simply acquire the hardware. Now we don't need to do that any more. We can accommodate new servers within the virtual environment and complete deployment within an hour"

A continual, cost-effective cycle

Chris believes that the latest refresh has set the template for future upgrades. Although arrangements aren't yet set in stone, he says, "We'll probably run on this platform for another one to two years, then do something similar. The plan will most likely be to replace the SAN and host servers, and re-use the old servers for a replicated DR [disaster recovery] site.

"We'll be constantly cascading old equipment. Hardware lifespans mean we will have to upgrade down the track, so it makes sense to use the existing equipment to create a second site that is ready to go should we ever need it. It's all about justifying costs and making the most of our IT investments," Chris concludes.

“In the end, we chose to stay with Professional Advantage... They've always provided us with fantastic service. We find them proficient and professional, and we know they'll do a good job for us.”

Chris Maestrale, System Administrator.

About us

Professional Advantage is one of Australia's most awarded solutions providers, with over 20 years experience in helping organisations improve their business systems through industry leading software solutions. Our 250-strong team in 6 offices across Australia and internationally has successfully worked with over 1000 organisations.

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