



At a Glance

Solution

Élan Media Partners moved nine physical servers onto three HP servers running VMWare virtualisation. This has delivered a high-availability system providing easy upgrades, a robust daily backup regime, and the ability to create disaster recovery servers off-site if needed.

Industry

Online retail

Function

Server infrastructure

Locations

Sydney, Melbourne, Hong Kong

Challenges

- Guarantee high availability
- Support disaster recovery plans
- Update server infrastructure
- System performance

Benefits

- Fewer physical servers
- Improved system and database performance
- Reduced server power consumption
- Simplified systems administration
- High availability
- Disaster recovery

Virtual servers bring real peace of mind for Élan Media Partners

Élan Media Partners is a company better known by the online brands it operates, including wowhd.com, videoezy.com, blockbuster.com.au, ezydvd.com, ezyflix.com, chaos.com and play4me.com.

As a multinational operation, Élan Media Partners has offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Hong Kong and operates successfully in 15 countries, hosting its servers in Australia and Jersey in the Channel Islands. With 70 staff worldwide the company depends on its IT systems to maintain the turnaround and customer service it needs to compete while operating.

Élan Media Partners came to Professional Advantage with a familiar problem. Created in 2010 to operate businesses that date back as far as a decade, its ageing IT infrastructure was no longer coping with the demands placed on it.

“The servers and infrastructure were almost ten years old, so we really needed an upgrade,” IT Manager Muhammad Islam explained.

“ We also wanted to bring resilience and high availability to our systems, and we wanted to design the system for better disaster recovery and backup. ”

The key business systems, Islam says, are database systems running on Microsoft SQL Server, with Exchange Server powering the company’s email communications, and a Linux server configured to provide custom database reports to users in Melbourne and Sydney, and a warehousing solution.

There was also a need to create a more cost-effective environment, with its servers operating in a mix of on-premise servers and hosted servers. In consultation with Professional Advantage, it was decided to bring the entire server infrastructure in-house. This would allow the new virtualised solution to meet all Élan Media Partners’ needs.



Professional Advantage put in place a high performance Storage Area Network (SAN) to support Élan Media Partners database backend, instead of having the databases spread across multiple servers. Existing application requirements were analysed and configuration of the disk on the SAN was optimised for Élan Media Partner's usage. This provides better performance than the previous implementation, and greatly simplifies the process of adding extra storage.

With the help of Professional Advantage, Élan Media Partners has now replaced its server infrastructure with a new virtualised environment that allows three HP servers to handle the entire business. The servers run a VMware vSphere 5 virtualisation environment, with nine guest operating systems hosted on the virtualised solution. Backup is provided by the Veeam environment, which is designed specifically to work with VMWare.

Network security has also been boosted, with Professional Advantage replacing its older Juniper firewall with a Fortinet platform.

Islam says the virtual machines now handle nearly everything that was formerly hosted on individual servers.

Rapid ROI

Islam is looking for the system to pay for itself in two years, he says, with the investment expected to meet Élan Media Partners' needs for five years. He pointed out that savings can be identified throughout the new environment. The reduction in the number of physical servers not only simplifies systems administration – which relieves the load on the company's 15 IT staff – it also reduces the power consumption in the server room, which in turn reduces the amount of backup power needed.

But it's flexibility that excites Islam. "If you need more space, or if you need more servers, you just add another host or upgrade the SAN."

And that's without counting the productivity benefits he expects to deliver.

“The new system means no downtime and that means more productivity, which means more revenue.”

He also pointed out that the virtualisation meant the company's systems could be upgraded with fewer physical servers, a saving which he estimates is worth as much as \$15,000 on its own.

Peace of mind

Virtualisation has provided another benefit which Islam explained has far exceeded his expectations: not only has the new environment delivered far better performance, it's also delivering peace of mind.

Shortly before it was due to be moved to the VMWare environment, he explains, the company's Microsoft Exchange server suffered a catastrophic failure. The process of recovering the data and rebuilding the mail systems took a week, and proved to him that backup and disaster recovery are key benefits of the virtualised system.

"We didn't have a good backup process in place before, but we have now," he admits. Élan Media Partners now has full daily backups of all of its systems, including email, its SQL Server databases, and its corporate intranet. And with VMWare operating in high-availability mode, users never see problems with the servers.

Islam is enthusiastic about the way virtualisation is protecting availability. "If a host goes down, the transfer is instantaneous." Even a more serious outage can be recovered much more quickly than before. "If we have to restore a system from the backup images, it might take a day, if we lost a whole location. "Before, without the virtualisation, it might take a week to get back for one email server"

The new system also means Élan Media Partners can begin putting in place a solid disaster recovery system, which Islam doesn't believe would have been possible before.

"It's easy to replicate the virtual servers to another location for disaster recovery," he commented. A disaster recovery server can be created in a handful of hours and the new servers will be in exactly the same state they were in when the snapshot was taken.



Fast rollout

Élan Media Partners lives and breathes a world of fast turnarounds, and that's what it needed from its new systems. Professional Advantage delivered the entire process from first contact to completion in six weeks, and the implementation accomplished in just four days.

"Everything went smoothly and on schedule," Islam smiled.

The fast, smooth rollout means that the process has been nearly invisible to users with better performance (especially on the critical corporate email and intranet services) the key impact. Islam, on the other hand, is impressed with the simplified administration as well as the performance of the SAN.

Professional Advantage's team was ... "very professional", he mused. "Professional Advantage came to us to explain to my management what they had to offer, and what the new systems would bring to our company. They were very helpful identifying the vendors we should work with."

An example Islam gave was the choice of the Veeam backup environment. "We had to deal with a mix of Microsoft and Linux servers. Professional Advantage went through the options with us, and Veeam was the most cost-effective that could do the job for us. It also lets us backup to an offsite location with no extra licensing."

With his key infrastructure now stable, Islam is now looking to the future. He plans to speak with Professional Advantage about setting up offsite disaster recovery once a suitable co-location facility can be found, and further developing Élan Media Partners' IP security capabilities.



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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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