CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

ACCENT GROUP

Phoenix creates a hyper-converged infrastructure with VMware vSAN™ for leading UK housing association. The project provides the customer with high performance compute and storage, improving both in-house and customer facing applications and websites.

Founded in 1966, Accent Housing provides social housing for 35,000 people and has grown considerably in recent years to now manage 20,000 homes across the UK.

CHALLENGE

Recently, Accent's more significant growth has come through mergers and acquisition, which has led to a need to overhaul the existing IT infrastructure, creating a modern, agile and consistent platform for continued growth. It needed a platform on which to integrate new acquisitions. Performance and capacity are the watchwords for a busy and growing organisation like Accent and both were being compromised. Of particular concern was the ageing storage infrastructure.

AT-A-GLANCE

Challenge
Accent's existing SAN was coming to its end of life, as was the HPE blade hardware. This infrastructure had failed to keep pace with the increasing amounts of data that were being generated by the group and the ageing compute was not delivering the performance the organisation required. This also threatened its disaster recovery position which had implications for some of its industry regulations.

Solution
The Phoenix proposal was to move towards a hyperconverged IT infrastructure (HCI), integrating the compute and storage components of the Accent data centre. Phoenix managed the full process, including the design, installation, testing and data migration.

Benefits
Accent Housing now has a high performance, scalable and secure IT platform, with proven disaster recovery and simplified operations.

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"There were performance issues and another problem was lack of capacity," says Accent's Service Delivery Manager, Nigel Barry. "When we wanted to spin up a new server, sometimes we had to downsize or decommission other servers to try and make enough space.

With the old solution, if we had wanted to just increase the disk space slightly, we would have had to buy a completely new shelf and then buy the disks on top, which was very costly. That is why we looked at going with a new, replacement solution."

When the contract on the old system was coming up for renewal, Accent Housing looked at new systems on the market and issued a Request for Proposal (RFP).

"We were looking for a solution that would allow us to grow to meet both current and future demands and that was easy to upgrade and maintain," says Nigel.

SOLUTION

Accent Housing has worked with Phoenix Software for a number of years, particularly around the provision of its Microsoft licences.

The Phoenix proposal was to move towards a hyper-converged IT infrastructure (HCI), integrating the compute and storage components of a data centre. This would reduce manual processes and the need for siloed operational expertise, creating a single, converged IT team to monitor and manage compute and storage resources.

Accent currently has a traditional virtualised infrastructure in place based upon 12 VMware vSphere® hosts in Shipley and four vSphere hosts located at a second site in Bradford. The HCI proposal was based on Accent's existing vSphere while layering on top of VMware vSAN, which was built into the latest release of the vSphere product.

"vSAN blew all the other solutions out of the water," says Nigel. "It ticked all the boxes and more. It was the ease of use, the resilience and redundancy of the system plus the ease with which we could upgrade, change and patch, which we've now done several times in-house."

Phoenix engaged pre-sales, created and ratified a design. It then installed and migrated workloads, provided training, did full handover and future-proofed the vSAN.

"It left us in a really good position," says Nigel.

"Having VMware vSAN just makes things so much easier. It has given us the ability to tap in and utilise new technologies that will make our lives even easier. There's also the peace of mind that we have a strong foundation for current needs and a future-proofed solution to support business growth."

Nigel Barry
Service Delivery Manager
Accent Group

RESULTS

Implementing vSAN from VMware offered the customer improved storage performance on all flash storage, reduced management complexity and improved DR SLAs. By removing physical SAN technology and moving into the host, Accent hugely simplified its IT management.

The Phoenix engagement delivers a number of additional benefits:

· Improved flexibility and DR options allowing simple failover and failback to a DR location
· CAPEX savings through most cost-effective purchase versus traditional SAN and compute nodes
· More performant storage than traditional SANs and benefiting from an all flash approach
· No tiering in storage and all flash, therefore removing some of the performance issues Accent has seen before with data tiered across storage layers
· Provided not only a new storage solution, but also new modern specified vSphere hosts delivering significant performance gains over the existing blades currently in use
· Reduction in rack space, power and cooling
· Reduction in the number of vSphere licences the organisation needed to pay support and maintenance on; from 36 down to 24.

Because the vSAN kernel is embedded into vSphere and the storage is local to the host, IO throughput has been improved as external storage arrays are not required. Administration is also simpler because there is only one contact for both storage and compute.

"The configuration is also a big improvement," says Nigel. "Increasing the disk space with our old system was an out-of-hours job. Now we can do it a lot more quickly. You just click from the console to expand the drive and it's done."

Regulatory compliance is more straightforward, as Nigel explains: "This is a big issue for us and the ability of vSAN to move the data around so quickly has enabled us to do a lot of housekeeping in terms of reporting on the amount of data we have."

The project has proved so successful Accent has committed to two new servers. It will install and configure two additional servers to expand the current six-node all flash vSAN solution. The two servers are required to host the new Skype for Business solution. In total, there will be 12 additional virtual servers within the new solution to run over these two nodes.

In addition, Accent Housing is considering a proposal for a three-node vSAN cluster for its DR site to host the telephony system.

"Phoenix provided outstanding service and when we added VMware vSAN, the end-users immediately noticed a speed difference when using applications. Things were resolved a lot more quickly in our main housing application and day-to-day jobs are a lot quicker."

Nigel Barry
Service Delivery Manager
Accent Group

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

To find out how we can help you transform any aspect of your IT estate contact Phoenix now on:

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