

Travel Insurer Gains Stability, Agility Through Virtualization



Executive Summary

Customer Name: Seven Corners Inc.

Industry: Insurance

Location: Carmel, Indiana

Number of Employees: 150

Challenge:

- Enhance network reliability and performance
- Simplify data center management
- Provide flexible infrastructure that can scale to accommodate growth

Solution:

- Cisco Unified Computing System enables virtualization and unified management
- Cisco architecture integrates with NetApp and VMware for high performance and stability
- Cisco UCS B-Series Blade Servers provide 15-to-1 server consolidation

Results:

- Reduced operating costs by US\$475,000 within six months of deployment
- Slashed network outages, for cost savings of \$100,000 per month
- Improved application performance, reducing report run times and data backup from hours to minutes

Seven Corners lowers operating costs while improving performance after deploying Cisco solutions to virtualize data center.

Challenge

Founded in 1993, Seven Corners Inc. has grown to become one of the most respected insurers in the travel industry. From its headquarters in Carmel, Indiana, the company works with a network of 5000 brokers and 10,000 medical service and travel assistance providers to offer protection and assistance to private citizens, global corporations, government organizations, and even foreign governments. At the core of the company's operations is Seven Corners' IT infrastructure and web presence, which consists of 45 websites and more than 200 branded domains.

When Chief Information Officer George Reed arrived on the scene in June 2010, the company's network, which needed to be available 24 hours a day to assist travelers, was running on a room full of equipment and legacy applications operating at capacity. "All of the desktops were at end-of-life and over-capacity," says Reed. "Some were on the slow path to blue-screening."

Reed knew that Seven Corners needed a new data center infrastructure. He also knew that he did not want to have to rebuild that infrastructure six months or a year later when the company's needs changed. By virtualizing the infrastructure, he knew he would not have to.

Solution

Seven Corners enlisted network integrator Netch Corp. to design a flexible, scalable architecture that would be fast to implement, easy to manage, and provide the necessary reliability and performance. The environment that Netch presented offered a combination of NetApp storage, Cisco computing, and VMware virtualization.

“Reports that used to take eight hours to run are now taking minutes. Thanks to the new environment, processing time is down dramatically.”

– **George Reed**
Chief Information Officer
Seven Corners



Deployed as a single platform, the virtualized environment was implemented on an aggressive schedule. When a key web server failed right after it had been migrated, that schedule became even more aggressive. Suddenly the new virtual server, which was intended for use as a test environment, became the full production environment. “If that server had failed before we’d migrated to the virtual environment, it would have cost us \$3 million in lost revenue, wasted time, and development of a system to run on the new hardware,” says Reed. “Thankfully, the virtual server ran perfectly the first time and has worked flawlessly ever since.”

When Seven Corners’ new environment went live, four Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS™) B200 M2 Blade Servers were running approximately 75 virtual servers in a VMware sphere environment. The environment also included Cisco® UCS 6120 Fabric Interconnects, a Cisco MDS 9148 Multilayer Fabric Switch, a Cisco Nexus® 1000V Virtual Network Switch, and Cisco Catalyst® 4900M Switch. Just four months later, Virtual Operations Manager Mike Ellis added another chassis and two Cisco UCS B230 M2 Blade Servers, effectively doubling the size of the environment. Best of all, the Seven Corners team was able to do so easily and with no downtime.

“We had many reasons to virtualize,” says Ellis. “But the primary reason we chose Cisco UCS was for its stateless computing. We knew it would take us from being five years behind in technology to being not only up to date but ready to scale and adapt to changes in technology and the growth of our business. Within months of deployment, we had already proven this.”

Today, the company’s environment supports a range of applications such as Adobe Cold Fusion, web front-ends, development and production databases, .NET applications, finance applications, and more. In addition, Seven Corners has a robust Microsoft deployment that is set to expand rapidly. “We’ve virtualized Microsoft SQL Server and run it on Cisco UCS and NetApp FlexPod, and we have about 150 instances of Microsoft SharePoint that we use for document management and workforce collaboration,” Ellis says. “We’re rolling out a new member portal, so we’re expecting our SharePoint users to grow to 50,000 by the end of next year. Given the scalability of UCS, we’re confident we’ll be able to accommodate that growth with ease.”

Results

The system paid for itself in less than a year by recouping the more than \$1 million the company had been losing annually due to network outages. The company also achieved a \$475,000 reduction in operating costs within the first six months of build-out and saved \$84,000 instantly by not having to renew software licenses on a number of virtualized servers.

Just as important to Reed are the across-the-board performance improvements that the new architecture has facilitated. “Reports that used to take eight hours to run are now taking minutes,” he says. “Thanks to the new environment, processing time is down dramatically. The day that we turned on the virtual infrastructure, an insurance carrier came into my office and said, ‘Is there something wrong with the reports? Mine came before my hand was off the mouse.’”

Product List

Data Center Solutions

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)
 - Cisco UCS B200 M2 Blade Servers
 - Cisco UCS B230 M2 Blade Servers
 - Cisco UCS 6120 Fabric Interconnects
- Cisco Nexus 1000V Virtual Network Switch
- Cisco MDS 9148 Multilayer Fabric Switch
- Cisco Catalyst 4900M Switch

Applications

- Microsoft Windows Server
- Microsoft SharePoint Server
- Microsoft SQL Server
- Microsoft Team Foundation Server
- Microsoft Project Server
- Adobe Cold Fusion
- CSS
- .NET applications

Seven Corners is now more agile and effective than ever before. With the 15-to-1 server consolidation afforded by the new environment, the company spends significantly less on power while reclaiming valuable data center real estate. What's more, the virtualized environment allows Reed to get by with fewer full-time IT employees. The new infrastructure has also given the insurer a competitive edge by allowing it to setup new server instances quickly and effortlessly so that it can add resources in response to customer demand.

Next Steps

For Seven Corners, the goal of the new infrastructure is to achieve 100 percent virtualization, with upcoming plans for a virtual desktop infrastructure as well. To that end, the company is looking to deploy a virtual private cloud for customers and a self-service portal for developers, both of which will rely heavily on Cisco, NetApp, and VMware solutions.

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Computing, visit: www.cisco.com/go/ucs.

To find out more about Cisco Nexus Switches, visit: www.cisco.com/go/nexus.

To find out more about Cisco MDS solutions, visit: www.cisco.com/go/mds.

To learn more about Cisco Catalyst Switches, visit: www.cisco.com/go/catalyst.

This customer story is based on information provided by Seven Corners Inc. and describes how that particular organization benefits from the deployment of Cisco products. Many factors may have contributed to the results and benefits described; Cisco does not guarantee comparable results elsewhere.

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