Blistering Transformation

NetApp®

LEADERS
Connecting people with property

Another NetApp
solution delivered by:

VOHKUS

Success Story

Leaders property company implemented the all-flash NetApp® AFF8060 to improve its virtual desktop infrastructure performance. As a result, the company not only gained lightning-fast speeds but also a storage platform that saves costs and time and provides a foundation for accelerated business growth.

Customer Profile

Leaders is one of the largest independent residential property groups in the UK. The company has 118 branches specialising in lettings, sales, buy-to-let, and investment finance. Leaders was established in 1983 as a single branch agency in Brighton and has grown substantially since then through expansion and acquisitions. Today it has branches across the northwest, southeast, southwest, East Midlands, East Anglia, and London.

This year Leaders merged with sister company Romans to combine the two companies' expertise and take advantage of economies of scale. Both Leaders and Romans are part of Property Services Holdings, which is backed by Bowmark Capital LLP. The group has annual revenues of over £100 million and more than 140 branches across the UK.

The Challenge

Leaders has largely grown through acquisition. Since 2009, this growth has accelerated significantly, from 38 branches to its present 140 branches. However, this rapid expansion outstripped the capability of its IT infrastructure to support business operations.

The company has 1,300 employees and 900 desktop PCs based on a virtual desktop infrastructure. Every morning up to 850 people log on to their computers from all over the country. The infrastructure struggled to cope with the demand, which meant that, each morning, employees had to wait approximately 10 minutes, and sometimes up to 15 minutes, before their virtual desktops were loaded.

David Roberts, IT manager at Leaders, says, "Our storage platform was based on NetApp FAS2040 and FAS2240. Basically we had too many users on the platform. Despite the growth of the business, the IT infrastructure hadn't kept pace, so the servers on which the applications were running were struggling to cope."

Employees also experienced the same problem when they logged off the system, which was typically at

> "AFF8060 has not only put an end to an enormous amount of downtime, but also from the business perspective is allowing us to grow even more by supporting the business in its tactical and strategic operations."

David Roberts
IT Manager
Leaders

5:30 p.m. Leaders' virtual desktop infrastructure served the company well considering it has a relatively small IT team, but the supporting storage platform needed upgrading. "The VDI was low maintenance, but we needed a new storage platform to address performance issues, support business operations, and underpin future expansion," adds David.

The Solution
Leaders has a longstanding relationship with its IT partner Vohkus. As a result, it was natural for Leaders to turn to the company for advice. Together the two explored a number of storage platform options, including those from EMC, Nimble, and NetApp.

David says, "Vokhus has an elite team of technicians dedicated to NetApp. This expertise is very important and we know that NetApp produces innovative and reliable storage technology. We had a positive experience with our previous platform but the business had grown so fast."

Performance was key for Leaders, so the company ultimately chose the NetApp AFF8060 built on the NetApp ONTAP® operating system, which combines all-flash performance with unified data management. AFF8060 was designed for speed, with database applications designed to run up to 20 times faster.

This all-flash technology reduces server and database licensing costs, thanks to greater CPU utilisation that is driven by flash performance. The technology is also ideally suited for Leaders' VDI infrastructure because it combines performance with scalability and data management. In addition, AFF8060 was considered a future-proof investment given its scale-out potential, reliability, and lightning-fast performance.

Business Benefits
Blisteringly fast
"The performance has absolutely blown away the previous kit—the all-flash array is capable of far more," says David. "It's solved our start-up problems and it now takes 30 seconds tops for someone to fire up their desktop."

Reduced operational costs
The introduction of AFF8060 has enabled Leaders to consolidate their two previous storage platforms—one for the VDI and one for the servers running the apps—into a single storage platform. Doing so has enabled the company to save costs on both power and space. It has also simplified management, freeing up the IT team to focus on business development tasks.

Improved business performance and reporting
The AFF8060 platform supports 50 virtual servers, with each server running one or more applications—the SQL Server that powered a help-desk application was previously sluggish. "The internal accounts team handles over 400 e-mails a day from the field requesting information relating to properties. Responding to these queries and running reports on different aspects of these requests took time, which was frustrating for the team. But the time it takes now has been dramatically reduced, enabling the team to be much more efficient."

"We couldn't have done it without Vokhus. They have an unrivalled deep level of NetApp insight and their prework analysis of performance bottlenecks was essential to the success of the implementation."

David Roberts
IT Manager
Leaders

Fast updates during business hours

The IT team used to have to stage and stagger updates to the VDI and applications, often having to work out of hours. David explains: "The update process is quite intensive and typically we would need to do it outside of business hours. But thanks to the performance of the AFF8060, we can now carry out updates during the day, which is much better."

Extreme reliability

David admits that one of his initial concerns about an all-flash storage platform was the perception of high failure rates. But this issue was successfully addressed with the NetApp AFF8060 system: "There is a perception of failure with flash, but we haven't had a single failure and are completely confident in the robust design of AFF8060."

Time-saving, easy management

Managing the NetApp AFF8060 is straightforward, making it easy for the IT team to plan infrastructure expansion. "Thanks to ONTAP, it's very easy to plug in additional nodes. In this sense it is easy to add additional platforms, which is a big benefit. This is due to the single point of management, and it makes it much easier for IT management, which of course also saves time," David explains.

Supporting business growth

The NetApp AFF8060 has not only helped drive up productivity and reduce total downtime across the business, but it has also provided a platform for business growth. David states, "AFF8060 has put an end to an enormous amount of downtime, but also from the business perspective is allowing us to grow even more by robustly supporting the business in its tactical and strategic operations."

Invaluable technical expertise from partner

David is effusive about the technical expertise of Vokhus's dedicated NetApp team: "We couldn't have done it without Vokhus. They have an unrivalled deep level of NetApp insight, and their prework analysis of performance bottlenecks was essential to the success of the implementation. They covered all of the risks and replaced a Fibre Channel backbone with 10Gb Ethernet network and architecture. They tested it out in their own environment and basically ensured the implementation would be a success from the word go."

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

- NetApp AFF8060
- 10Gb Ethernet backbone

Partner
Vohkus

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