



NetApp®

Success Story

The Commonwell Meets Deployment Deadline and 15-Minute Recovery Time Objective with FlexPod



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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry

Financial services

The Challenge

Meet tight deadline to consolidate three separate IT infrastructures while strengthening disaster recovery and improving management and cost efficiency.

The Solution

Create one IT infrastructure based on FlexPod® and VMware® solutions at three data centers and replicate critical data between sites for business continuity.

Benefits

- Meet deployment deadline with 2X faster setup and configuration
- Provide business continuity by meeting 15-minute RTO
- Enhance data protection by improving RPO 72-fold
- Avoid \$70,000 in annual costs with integrated data protection
- Spend 75% less time managing infrastructure
- Conserve up to 75% of storage capacity with deduplication

Customer Profile

The Commonwell Mutual Insurance Group (The Commonwell) began operations on January 1, 2014, after three mutual insurance companies joined together: Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company, Glengarry Mutual Insurance Company, and Lanark Mutual Insurance Company. The Ontario-based organization has 167 employees and offers residential, commercial, farm, automobile, and watercraft coverage.

The Challenge

Combining three IT infrastructures in six weeks

The Financial Services Commission of Ontario approved the amalgamation application in October 2013, leaving IT employees six weeks to design, deploy, and configure a new, combined infrastructure.

"We were given a tight timeline to integrate systems," says Brad Waller, manager of infrastructure and services at The Commonwell. "Missing the January 1 deadline would have had serious repercussions for the new business. Failure was not an option."

Strengthening disaster recovery capabilities

With three data center sites, Waller and Justin Davidson, infrastructure architect, saw an opportunity to improve disaster recovery (DR). Before the amalgamation, the fastest recovery that any of the three organizations could provide in a potential disaster situation was 48 hours, with a 24-hour recovery point objective (RPO).

"Losing up to a day's worth of data would be a big problem for The Commonwell," says Davidson. "That represents a lot of claims, a lot of sales—a lot of work."

After conferring with business leaders, Waller and Davidson were tasked with meeting a new recovery time objective of 15 minutes for business-critical applications, while minimizing any data loss.

The Solution

FlexPod solution with clustered storage

The Commonwell engaged HighVail Systems, a NetApp partner, and explained its requirements for fast deployment, simplified management,

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Brad Waller

Manager of Infrastructure and Services, The Commonwell Mutual Insurance Group

and robust disaster recovery. HighVail recommended a FlexPod solution—a validated architecture that combines NetApp® storage, Cisco Nexus® switches, and Cisco Unified Computing System™ (Cisco UCS) server components into a single, flexible platform.

“When HighVail presented the FlexPod solution with its speed of deployment and management efficiencies, it made no sense to look at anything else,” says Waller.

At The Commonwell’s primary data center, HighVail deployed a FlexPod Datacenter solution with a NetApp FAS3220 storage system, Cisco UCS 5108 blade server chassis and B-Series blade servers with UCS Manager, Cisco UCS 2200 Series fabric extenders, and Cisco Nexus 5548 and 4500 Series switches.

At The Commonwell’s other two sites, HighVail deployed a FlexPod Express platform, which uses NetApp FAS2240 storage systems, Cisco UCS C-Series Rack Mount servers, and Cisco Nexus 3000 Series switches. All NetApp systems run the NetApp clustered Data ONTAP® operating system, which allows The Commonwell to operate with zero storage downtime and move workloads nondisruptively to meet business requirements.

Most of The Commonwell’s business-critical applications, including Microsoft® Exchange Server, claims processing, inspection applications, and Oracle® and Microsoft SQL Server® databases, run on VMware virtual machines that access the NetApp storage using the iSCSI protocol. Corporate file shares leverage the CIFS protocol for concurrent access.

NetApp SnapMirror® technology automatically replicates new or changed data blocks between The Commonwell’s primary data center and one of the FlexPod Express sites every 20 minutes, while the third site acts as a disk-to-disk backup target using NetApp SnapVault® software. To automate disaster recovery, The Commonwell uses VMware vCenter™ Site Recovery Manager™.

NetApp OnCommand® System Manager provides an easy-to-use storage management interface, and NetApp Virtual Storage Console for VMware vSphere® enables storage provisioning from within VMware vCenter. The Commonwell also benefits from space-efficient NetApp Snapshot™ copies and SnapRestore technology for rapid restore of whole volumes and single files. NetApp FlexClone® software and deduplication maximize storage efficiency. “We’re saving up to 75% of the storage capacity in our VMware environment with NetApp deduplication,” says Davidson.

Business Benefits

Twofold faster deployment with FlexPod

The combination of swift, expert service from HighVail and the accelerated deployment advantages of FlexPod allowed The Commonwell to meet its deployment timeline and make the cutover as planned on January 1.

“HighVail really came through to make sure our deployment stayed on track,” says Waller. “FlexPod is even faster to deploy than advertised. If we had taken a more traditional approach using disparate servers and storage, it would have taken us twice as long to deploy—or cost us twice as much.”

Meeting recovery objectives while saving \$70,000 a year

With integrated data protection tools from NetApp, The Commonwell has eliminated backup service contracts that the former insurance companies had in place. “We’re saving \$70,000 a year by bringing backup and recovery in-house and automating it with NetApp tools,” says Waller.

By taking NetApp Snapshot copies and replicating critical data off site, The Commonwell has improved its RPO from 24 hours to 20 minutes, a 72-fold reduction. “With NetApp and VMware Site Recovery Manager, we’re prepared to meet a 15-minute recovery time

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objective with less than 20 minutes of data loss,” says Davidson. “We can also conduct DR tests whenever we want, without paying a fee.”

Easy to manage and grow

In the future, if other mutual insurance companies join the group, The Commonwell can easily bring its systems and data on board. “With FlexPod, I’m spending 75% less time managing the infrastructure, even though we’re now a much larger organization,” says Davidson. “We could do this again and again.”

The IT team’s successful planning and execution were appreciated by The Commonwell’s business leaders. “We were able to meet a challenging deployment deadline when our companies combined, while improving service quality,” says Waller. “Our FlexPod infrastructure from NetApp and Cisco, along with VMware, is the reason we were successful.”

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

FlexPod Datacenter Components (Primary Data Center)

NetApp FAS3220 storage system with clustered Data ONTAP 8.2

Cisco UCS 5108 blade server Chassis and B-Series blade servers with UCS Manager

Cisco UCS 2200 Series fabric extenders

Cisco Nexus 5548 and 4500 Series switches

FlexPod Express Components (DR and Backup Sites)

NetApp FAS2240 storage systems with clustered Data ONTAP 8.2

Cisco UCS C-Series Rack Mount servers

Cisco Nexus 3000 Series switches

Virtualization Components

VMware vSphere 5

VMware vCenter

VMware Site Recovery Manager

NetApp Products

NetApp OnCommand System Manager

NetApp Virtual Storage Console for VMware vSphere

NetApp Snapshot technology

NetApp SnapRestore

NetApp SnapMirror

NetApp SnapVault

NetApp FlexClone

NetApp deduplication

Third-Party Products

Microsoft Exchange Server

Microsoft SQL Server

Claims processing and inspection applications

Protocols

CIFS

iSCSI

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