



NetApp®

Success Story

Rent-A-Center Rapidly Expands into New Market with NetApp Storage



Another NetApp solution delivered by:



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry
Retail

The Challenge
Keep up with accelerated growth trajectory of RAC Acceptance program.

The Solution
Implement highly flexible, easy-to-provision NetApp® V-Series open storage controllers in primary and secondary data centers.

Benefits

- Protects business operations and company brand with near-real-time data replication
- Achieves faster time toward reduced deployment costs by deploying the NetApp solution more than 50% ahead of schedule
- Reduces ongoing storage management costs by over 40% utilizing NetApp storage products and manageability

Customer Profile

Headquartered in Plano, Texas, Rent-A-Center (RAC) offers name-brand furniture, electronics, appliances, and computers through flexible rental agreements that generally allow customers to obtain ownership of the merchandise at the end of a rental period. Since its founding in 1986, RAC has grown from 16 stores to more than 3,050 across every state in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Canada through acquisitions and new store openings. The retailer is a Fortune 1000 company with total revenue in 2011 of \$2.9 billion.

The Challenge

Seizing new market opportunities

Today, more than one million customers rely on the name-brand products and services that RAC provides. The retailer enables consumers to furnish their homes with the merchandise they need with no long-term obligation, down payment, or the worry of repair bills. To make its products and services even more accessible to consumers and create new revenue opportunities, in 2005 the company launched the RAC Acceptance program.

The rent-to-own concept, born out of the desire to serve the needs of customers who lacked the cash or financing to buy the products they wanted and needed, has grown into a \$6.7 billion industry serving millions of customers. Through the rent-to-own concept, customers can shop at a local RAC Acceptance retail partner such as Ashley Homestore, Rooms To Go, or Conn's. After selecting the merchandise they want, customers can elect to make affordable monthly payments through RAC Acceptance and immediately schedule a delivery.

The rapid growth of the RAC Acceptance program, now with over 760 locations, resulted in some intense IT challenges for the company. The systems that support RAC Acceptance are located in a central data center and accessed online at the local retail partner sites via RAC's virtualized infrastructure. With new partner site opportunities occurring all year long, the RAC IT team found its previous IT infrastructure lacked the agility and scalability needed to quickly and easily provision the storage required to get new RAC Acceptance sites up and running. Day to day, the storage environment was inefficient and costly to maintain.

“NetApp agility and manageability help us penetrate this rapidly expanding market while reducing storage management costs.”

Elliot Pierron

Director, Systems and Operations, Rent-A-Center, Inc.

“We have experienced rapid growth in our RAC Acceptance business, but we reached a point where our storage infrastructure was challenged to keep up with our expansion,” says Elliot Pierron, Director, Systems and Operations at RAC. “Our disparate storage environment was becoming expensive to manage, given disaster recovery and other inherent complexities. To accommodate growth, we needed to expand a storage platform that already wasn’t meeting our needs. From cost per terabyte to performance and disaster recovery, we needed a different storage solution.”

Protecting RAC Acceptance systems and transaction data was complex. With steady growth and increasing exposure to its centralized virtual environment, the IT team wanted to step up its data protection and disaster recovery strategies with more aggressive yet easier-to-manage replication activities. RAC chose to consolidate its storage environment and secure new, more robust capabilities for managing its storage, protecting its data, providing highly available RAC Acceptance systems and services, and optimizing its storage investment.

The Solution

Quick to deploy, easy to manage

To support and enable growth of the RAC Acceptance program, RAC chose

the NetApp V3240 open storage controller for its primary and secondary data centers. While NetApp V-Series systems typically front third-party storage arrays from EMC, HP, Hitachi, and others, RAC chose to initially deploy its V-Series with NetApp disk shelves to quickly respond to the fast-growing RAC Acceptance business and allow future storage management and flexibility options.

To assist with the deployment, RAC turned to expertise from Datalink, a participant in the NetApp Partner Program and a technology solutions provider focused on virtualization and consolidation, data storage and protection, advanced network infrastructure, and business continuity and disaster recovery. The deployment was successfully completed ahead of schedule.

“To quickly gain the much-needed storage benefits for our RAC Acceptance business, we were motivated to fully deploy the NetApp solution in eight weeks,” says Pierron. “With help from NetApp and Datalink, we completed the project in less than four weeks.”

The NetApp V3240 systems run on the Data ONTAP® 8.0 architecture operating in 7-Mode, which increases operational efficiency by providing a single system management framework. The NetApp Virtual Storage Tier, which utilizes

NetApp storage efficiency technologies, helps boost RAC Acceptance system performance and enhance service delivery. OnCommand® Balance software helps the IT team optimize the performance and capacity of the virtual and physical data center infrastructure.

The RAC Acceptance virtualized infrastructure is supported by the Citrix XenServer managed server virtualization platform built on the Xen hypervisor and it includes 3 clusters of 10 virtual servers. Data is efficiently protected with NetApp SnapMirror® technology for near-real-time data replication between the V3240 systems in the company’s primary and secondary data centers. Snapshot™ and SnapRestore® technologies allow RAC to protect important customer data locally with incremental copies of data and to quickly restore point-in-time versions of inadvertently deleted files.

Business Benefits

Helping RAC Acceptance and its partners grow

Today, the RAC Acceptance program continues to rapidly expand. More and more military families, professionals who move regularly, students, and others can take advantage of the flexible payment plans and same-day delivery offered.

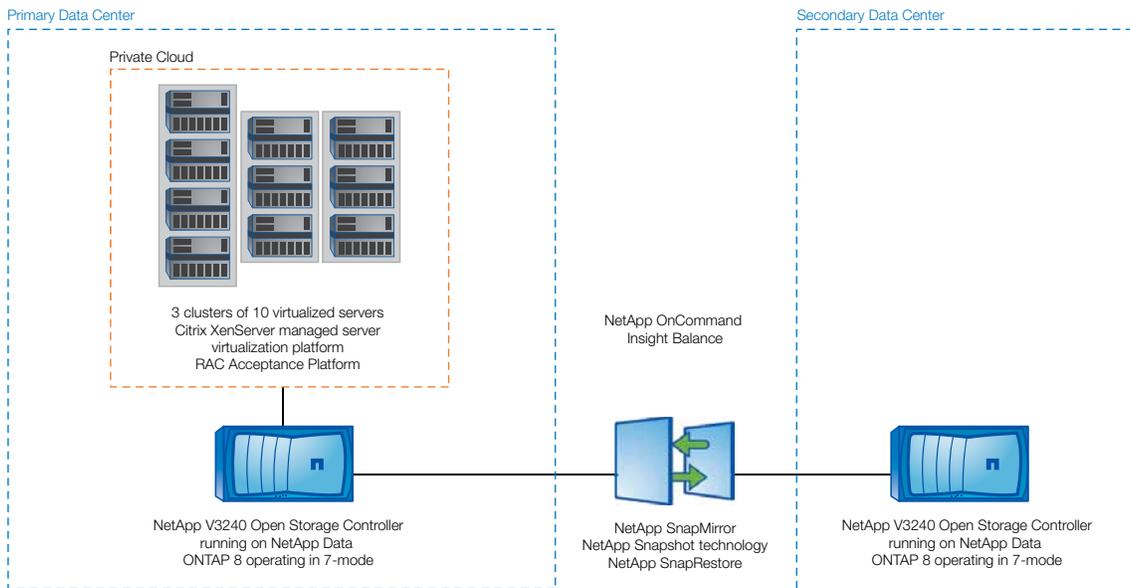


Figure 1) Rent-A-Center storage infrastructure.

The NetApp V3240 Open Storage Controllers running in both primary and secondary datacenters give Rent-A-Center the flexibility and data protection they need.

“We’re able to offer our services to customers that we wouldn’t otherwise see in our RAC rent-to-own environment,” says Pierron. “NetApp agility and manageability help us penetrate this expanding market while reducing storage management costs. We can quickly and seamlessly bring new retail stores into our RAC Acceptance network at an accelerated pace.” In addition, by partnering with furniture, appliance, and other retailers, RAC Acceptance helps partners grow their business by increasing sales and expanding their customer base.

To keep pace with growth, the RAC Acceptance IT staff has established a predesigned, preconfigured NetApp storage and Citrix XenServer environment that allows the team to quickly connect new stores with RAC Acceptance. Once provisioned for a new partner site, the infrastructure offers the performance and availability needed to enable retail partners to access the RAC Acceptance system remotely 24/7 and meet the immediate needs of their customers.

The company leverages NetApp OnCommand Balance to monitor performance in the NetApp storage environment and to optimize utilization. System visibility enables IT to identify utilization spikes and potential bottlenecks, actively troubleshoot, and con-

tinue to meet service-level agreements by staying within required performance parameters.

Protecting customer data and the RAC Acceptance brand

Accelerated growth of the RAC Acceptance business has resulted in steady growth in customer data, which means increasing data to manage. With NetApp data protection and disaster recovery capabilities, the IT team leverages the NetApp Unified Storage Architecture to simplify data replication and enhance its business continuity plan. The staff uses automated SnapMirror capabilities to copy business-critical RAC Acceptance data to its remote disaster recovery site. Thorough testing of the backup and recovery strategy has proved that the company and important customer data are well protected.

“In the event of missing files or data, without a reliable disaster recovery plan we would lose revenue,” says Pierron. “We could also potentially suffer short-term and even long-term damage to our brand by losing the trust of both customers and our retail partners. Through testing, we have the proof that NetApp disaster recovery capabilities will enable us to quickly recover customer data if needed, keep our RAC Acceptance business up and running, and protect our brand.”

Storage agility for today and tomorrow

With a reliable, flexible storage platform supporting the RAC Acceptance program, the organization can continue to adopt new retail stores into its network while leveraging the NetApp storage solution to deliver exciting new IT services that will help move the business forward. Potential new projects include deploying a virtual desktop infrastructure, initially to 600 desktops, using Citrix XenDesktop and leveraging the NetApp V3240 open storage controller to front other storage systems such as HP storage arrays. The NetApp V-Series will allow the company to leverage existing storage investments while gaining the NetApp advantages of storage efficiency, high availability, and simplified management for those arrays.

“A stable, reliable storage platform with superior performance is an absolute must,” notes Pierron. “Storage flexibility and scalability are also critical. With years of experience in storage technology, I have been favorably impressed with the performance, capabilities, flexibility, and value of our NetApp storage arrays in supporting our business requirements. NetApp helps enable us to seamlessly scale the solution if needed, and effectively manage and protect partner site data week after

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week. We are confident that NetApp storage will continue to enable the incredible growth and revenue opportunities of our RAC Acceptance business—tomorrow and well into the future.”

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

NetApp Products

NetApp V3240 open storage controllers

Data ONTAP 8.0 operating in 7-Mode

Snapshot technology

SnapRestore

SnapMirror

OnCommand Balance

Protocols

Fibre Channel

Third-Party Products

Citrix XenServer

Citrix XenDesktop

Partner

Datalink

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