Marshall & Sterling Insurance

ATLANTIS™

INSURANCE AGENCY ENSURES PEAK PERFORMANCE WITH ATLANTIS HYPERSCALE

Atlantis HyperScale **eliminated the purchase of three additional appliances** and associated VMware licenses while delivering a high-performance virtual desktop experience to 300 additional users.

Founded in 1864, Marshall & Sterling's operations span 26 locations across the continental U.S. as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands. An employee-owned company, Marshall & Sterling's client-services professionals rely on the IT team to help efficiently serve their insurance customers expediently and with high levels of service.

Marshall & Sterling provides a wide array of insurance and risk management services including commercial and personal insurance products, group life and health benefit plans and administration, fiduciary and fidelity bonds, self insurance administration, risk management and loss control services, and wealth management and financial planning. Special divisions within the company offer insurance services for armored car, cash-in-transit, ATM, pawnbroker, and precious metal refining clients as well as equine, farm, and ranch customers.

VIRTUAL PIONEERS

With three primary datacenters serving more than 430 users spread across five states and the US Virgin Islands, Marshall & Sterling's IT team led by Jim Dahoney, CIO and Vice President, is charged with delivering high-quality network and application performance to help maintain and grow the company's operations.

As an early adopter of virtualization technologies, Marshall & Sterling has been "99.9% virtualized" since the beginning running Citrix for over 20 years and making extensive use of Citrix XenDesktop (Formerly Presentation Server) with VMware vSphere providing host and virtual machine management.

CHALLENGES
- Roll out 300 additional virtual desktops, while avoiding exorbitant spending
- Improve poor end-user performance

SOLUTION
Atlantis HyperScale all-flash, hyperconverged appliance with 2TB of memory and 12TB of storage.

BENEFITS
- Single Atlantis HyperScale appliance eliminated the purchase of three competing hyperconverged appliances
- Greater density than prior hyperconverged appliance allowing more users from a single appliance.
- Improved end-user experience, especially during times of peak demand
- Login times averaging 15 seconds that were up to three times shorter.
- Reduced power consumption in both datacenters and offices
- Plenty of headroom for continued expansion

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VDI DRIVES SEARCH FOR PERFORMANCE

The most recent major infrastructure upgrade moved to a combination of disk-based SAN and hyper-converged appliance products to serve up production data.

But as Marshall & Sterling's growth intensified, the IT team found that these solutions couldn't grow with them. Performance was lagging, and without expensive upgrades the current solutions would never be able to support a pending, enterprise-wide switch to Citrix XenDesktop.

The IT team considered using their disk-based SAN to support the VDI environment with SSD drives but discovered that absent another large investment, they could support at most 160 VMs on a four-host system that did not include the management system. When the team looked at getting enough density per host in their existing solution, it just didn't make financial sense.

Dahoney says that "There was no way we could spin up another 300 to 400 virtual desktops, much less do it cost effectively. We would have had to purchase double — if not triple — the number of host VMware licenses, and also purchase multiple hardware appliances."

THE ALL-FLASH PROPOSITION

Value-added reseller AxiomIO introduced the Marshall & Sterling team to the Atlantis HyperScale all-flash, hyper-converged appliances. After perusing several white papers on HyperScale, Dahoney was impressed with the claims but skeptical as the results seemed too good to be true.

"Atlantis claimed its data deduplication could provide over 12TB of effective space using only 4TB of actual flash. And the density of virtual desktops per host looked very high. Knowing the storage and VDI performance we got with our current solutions, I was a bit skeptical as to whether the Atlantis solution could actually deliver on these numbers."

In fact, the numbers suggested that a single Atlantis HyperScale appliance could supply the same VDI density and CPU/memory performance as three to four of their existing hyper-converged appliances, which was too good to ignore.

"We're seeing huge performance gains in both deduplication and client responsiveness. Login times are two to three times shorter. I tested the desktop extensively and could not break it."

Jim Dahoney
CIO and Vice President at
Marshall & Sterling Insurance

COST SAVINGS

Dahoney and his team spec'ed out an Atlantis HyperScale appliance with 2TB of memory and 12TB of effective all-flash storage and began the transition. Most of his users originated from a desktop refresh and the biggest task was provisioning over 300 new virtual desktops along with brand-new dual monitors and thin clients. The process took just three weeks and wrapped up in early October.

"We are mindful of expenses because we report directly to our shareholders, who are our employees," says Dahoney. "Using the Atlantis solution, we were able to revamp our VDI infrastructure and do it quickly, efficiently, and cost effectively, and with much better performance than we saw from prior solutions."

Most users had been running full-fledged PCs, so the team took the opportunity to convert them to thin clients. These new VDI-driven thin clients cost only a third of what new PCs would have cost, and, as an added bonus, used much less power.

Dahoney also reports that by using Atlantis HyperScale, they can run up to 400 desktops on a single appliance. "We're also seeing power savings in the datacenter, serving more users with fewer appliances and switches. And if we tried to do this through our current solution, it would have meant at least 10 to 12 additional hosts for which we'd need to pay hypervisor licensing," says Dahoney.

REAL-WORLD PERFORMANCE

While the solution is only recently implemented, Dahoney considers the Atlantis deployment a resounding success. They're seeing huge performance gains in both deduplication and client responsiveness. Login times are less than 20 seconds and average roughly 15 seconds.

"That's compared to our previous hyperconverged solution, where it's two or three times slower than that speed, and in our disk based system, we're looking at a couple of minutes for logins," says Dahoney. "I also tested the desktop extensively and could not break it. And while our app suite officially called for 3GB of RAM, we only needed 2GB thanks to the deduplication and other factors inherent to HyperScale."

"I feel lucky that we found out about Atlantis at the right time," Dahoney concludes. "Thanks to Atlantis HyperScale, we were able to complete our massive refresh in much less time, with much less cost, and with better final performance than we'd previously thought possible."

"Atlantis definitely met the goals that we had in mind with trying to control not only costs, but our management overhead."

Jim Dahoney
CIO and Vice President at Marshall & Sterling Insurance

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