

FlashDisk and FlexSAN Help Cruise Vacation Provider Optimize System and Manage Cost

Slashes A/R & A/P processing time from 1 hour to 5 minutes

OVSCruise



In only four and a half years, Our Vacation Store has grown into the world's largest provider of computer-based application services that handles all aspects of marketing, sales, booking and fulfillment to the cruise vacation industry. Headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, the company has formed alliances with every major cruise line, thereby making it the definitive one source ASP provider of cruise information. Its proprietary software program, OVSCruise, also handles accounting functions that allow its clients to determine which cruises are nearly full and then adjust their marketing efforts accordingly. As Matthew DeBoer, Special Projects Coordinator, says, "OVSCruise is basically an all-in-one resource that provides everything a travel company needs to sell cruises to customers."

Replacing Internal Storage

Like many startups, Our Vacation Store was initially able to meet its storage and access requirements by using the Dell server's internal storage consisting of up to 18 hard drives. According to DeBoer, "In the beginning, we were able to get by

because we didn't have a whole lot of traffic and our databases were not getting hit too hard. However, things began to change when we started getting

more of the larger customers; we just couldn't handle the traffic anymore. We were spending money on products that were a bandaid, but not a fix for the long term." More importantly, according to David Eaton, the database administrator, "A/R and A/P posting would take an hour or more," obviously slowing down progress in accounting and impacting operations.

FlashDisk cut processing time by 92%.

"This is a very disk intensive activity, so the best solution was to eliminate the disk bottleneck," he emphasized.

Volume and Speed Drives a SAN Solution

Faced with a rapidly growing business, Eaton concluded that a storage attached network (SAN) was the logical solution to meet the company's high quality-of-service agreements and meet the performance needs too. While they entertained EMC's storage products briefly, they quickly realized that the price point was much too high to even consider. Fortunately, In the past, Eaton had a

very good experience with Winchester Systems, a leading vendor of high performance raid disk arrays for SAN, NAS and direct attach environments, and recommended them to DeBoer who initiated a conference call with them. Pleased with the initial impression, Eaton and DeBoer then arranged to have an engineer come in to discuss the company's needs. This meeting clinched the deal.

Today, OVSCruise has adopted Winchester Systems' storage products for all of its demanding tiered storage requirements, using different SAN products to optimize the entire system. In particular, the company uses FlashDisk OpenSAN to run its 1.5 terabyte SQL database. This is attached to two SQL Intel database servers via QLogic Fibre Channel Host Bus Adapters (HBAs). One drive shelf has 12x73 GB/15k Fibre Channel drives configured with multiple arrays. RAID 10 was chosen in that it has the throughput speeds of RAID 1, and the fault tolerance of RAID 5. A second shelf of 16x146 GB Fibre Channel drives is used for file serving through the network. Our Vacation Store also maintains a "lights out" co-location facility that requires very high availability. They meet this requirement with a second shelf of FlashDisk OpenSAN of 16x146 GB Fibre Channel drives that is direct attached to four Windows

Intel database servers, again running SQL via QLogic HBAs. Finally, OVS meets its low-cost file serving requirements with four FlexSAN iSCSI units attached via Gigabit Ethernet.

Realized Benefits:

Up and Running in an Hour

The design of the Winchester Systems SAN resulted in a very simple and straightforward installation, which DeBoer describes: “Winchester Systems sent a team of technicians to meet us at the facility. They ran us through the entire installation, including training, in an hour.” DeBoer also appreciates that Winchester Systems’ SAN does not require any additional software on the OS layer. As soon as the fibre cards were inserted and the drivers installed, the partitions were automatically available. It is totally platform independent -- all managed by disk management utilities whether using Windows or Linux.

Built-in Switch, Major Cost Savings

The SAN is connected to one of the RAID heads that has a built-in fibre switch. In this regard, Our Vacation Store is able to directly connect all its databases to the SAN without having to buy a fibre switch. This feature alone saves the company upward of \$10,000.

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Matthew DeBoer,
Special Projects Coordinator

Performance

“Immediately, our hour long A/R and A/P posting ran in 5 minutes or less,” exclaimed a pleased Eaton. “In addition, the overall speed of the system was noticeably and dramatically improved,” he added.

“FlashDisk was the solution to the problems with the accounting system, and then they saw the virtues of the systems and expanded the scope.”

“The overall speed of the system was noticeably and dramatically improved.”

David Eaton,
Database Administrator

Outstanding Customer Service

DeBoer also touts the service he receives from Winchester Systems: “Winchester Systems’ support is definitely better than many other companies that I’ve worked with. The fact that I can call into tech support and get someone within a minute who knows what they’re doing, and have a problem solved

within 24 hours – you can’t beat that! I know companies much larger than Winchester Systems, and they can’t compete with that level of service.”

Handling Growth with a “Click, Click, Click”

DeBoer foresees a two to three hundred percent growth within the next two years, which means multiple terabytes of capacity. Such growth will happen in two ways: there will be a growth in the number of clients and a growth in the applications themselves. He observes, “If you can’t grow your databases with your company, you are going to consistently run into storage problems. Storage is one of the main problems I deal with. If we want to add on a new piece on to the application that will grow the company by 20 percent, I need to be able to add that on to the backend without downtime: We can’t have downtime since we have quality of service agreements with our clients.”

DeBoer sums it up nicely: “With Winchester Systems, I can add a new drive shelf, I can integrate it with the RAID heads, and boom it’s done. I can grow my partitions as I need to – taking only a few minutes while it formats. I can just pop that on to the other with the original partition and I’m good to go. Just, click, click, click and two minutes later I have another 2 GB. That is invaluable.”

For more information on iSCSI, SAN, NAS and SATA solutions from Winchester Systems go to www.winsys.com

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