

HP Blade storage solution has the edge



New generation IT infrastructure systems are bringing higher return on investment when compared with traditional storage systems. By combining HP BladeSystems and HP storage area networks (SANs), Telford based Windsor Life has cut its operating costs, introduced more efficient backups, and improved disaster recovery arrangements.

About Windsor Life

Serving more than 750,000 policyholders, Windsor Life manages more than £6 billion of funds. Part of Swiss Re, one of the world's leading reinsurance groups, the company offers life assurance, pensions, permanent health cover and annuities. In December 2005, it acquired the businesses of Reassure UK and Virgin Money Life.

IT infrastructure under strain

Windsor Life is a long-term user of HP technology. Before introducing HP BladeSystems and storage area networks, its applications ran on HP servers with storage provided by centralised HP systems. Disaster recovery contracts included an HP mobile recovery trailer and temporary office space from ICM Recovery Services.

By mid 2005, continual business growth was beginning to strain its IT systems. Storage space had become tight and more facilities were needed for urgent testing and development work.

Windsor Life's IT Manager, Duncan Taylor, said: "Our infrastructure was inhibiting the amount of testing we could do and we felt cramped. Our disaster recovery arrangements were proving very expensive too."

Solving IT together



Scalable, flexible and easy to manage

Faced with the spiralling costs associated with the need to continually maintain and upgrade its old equipment, Windsor life had a complete rethink. New HP BladeSystems seemed an attractive solution and would also support a planned desktop transition to Microsoft Windows Server 2003 and Windows XP. Windsor Life asked its incumbent IT partner to put the pieces of the project into place.

HP storage specialist reseller, DTP, was then consulted for HP BladeSystems and storage area network expertise. DTP was able to demonstrate the financial and technical benefits of blade technology and, in particular, that even a one-for-one replacement of traditional servers with new, warranted HP BladeSystems would give a significant financial advantage.

HP BladeSystems with HP StorageWorks 6000 Enterprise Virtual Arrays (EVAs) offered a centralised storage solution with modular scalability, flexibility, and ease of management. If duplicated on a second site it would also offer a dual-use platform for testing and disaster recovery. Furthermore, each site's storage was manageable in a single pool, allowing for rapid backups.

The project began in Summer 2005. Migration testing for over 400 applications for the new Microsoft Windows Server 2003/Windows XP desktop ran in parallel with the implementation of HP BladeSystems, other HP servers, and the HP StorageWorks EVA 6000s. HP's Business Copy and Data Protector software was also installed along with a tape library system.

Immediate savings

DTP, working closely with HP and Partner Services, provided pricing and technical advice, and once specifications were finalised, designed the solution and implemented the new hardware. The project which was led by Windsor Life's IT partner, resulted in a leading edge, future-proof corporate solution that immediately saved over £100,000 compared to traditional replacement server storage systems.

"We did a phased rollout of applications, desktops, and servers department by department. By the end of 2005, everyone was running on the new desktops and HP BladeSystems," said Taylor.

“ We now have a modern infrastructure that gives us better performance with a lot more scope for extra capacity too. ”

Duncan Taylor
IT Manager, Windsor Life

Simplified backup and management

The new hardware at Windsor Life's Telford offices is used to host production systems. Under the old regime, staff struggled to complete nightly backups in under 12 hours. HP's Data Protector software now runs on an HP Superdome server with backups from the storage area network using an MSL6060 tape library. The job is completed smoothly across the network in less than half the time.

Day-to-day management of the new servers and storage is also assured through comprehensive software tools that fully complement HP BladeSystems technology. The new blade systems and networked storage have proved significantly easier to manage than the old infrastructure, helping free staff for more proactive tasks.

As Windsor Life expands, new development and testing work is taking place on the duplicate hardware installed at their IT partner's offices. As the second location, it also doubles as a disaster recovery site supported by a 100 Mbps link to alternative office accommodation provided by Sunguard. The projected time taken to restore IT services to 450 staff in an emergency has been cut from 72 hours to under 24.

Excellent return on investment

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The project is providing an excellent return on investment for Windsor Life. A new three-year warranted HP infrastructure has taken away rising maintenance charges and reduced disaster recovery costs. Management calculations show that, over this period, total costs will be some 10 per cent cheaper than alternative solutions. And, as the company continues to grow, systems expansion is no longer the hurdle that it once was.

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