HighVail

Architecting Effective Infrastructure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name:
The Commonwell Mutual
Insurance Group

Industry:
Insurance

Offices:
Lindsay, Alexandria, and Perth,
Ontario

Employees: 167

The Challenge:
Complete a complex integration of
three separate IT infrastructures
within two months and
simultaneously enhance disaster
recovery, agility and scalability.

The Solution:
Cisco and NetApp's Flexpod,
including Cisco Unified Computing
System servers, Cisco Nexus
Switches and NetApp Unified
Storage Systems.

The Results:
· New solution - Flexpod -
  implemented in 60 days
· Disaster recovery time reduced
  from 24 hours to 15 minutes
· Enhanced agility
· Reduced IT time
· Increased utilization of storage
  capacity by 30 to 50 percent
· Cost savings of over $70,000
  per year.

HighVail helps The Commonwell implement a completely new, agile and scalable infrastructure across a newly-integrated company — in record time.

As challenges go, the integration of three IT systems, each from a separate entity onto one highly-efficient platform, might be a little intimidating. For the team at HighVail, this represented an opportunity to further demonstrate their abilities to translate business goals into technology requirements and architect cost-effective IT infrastructures.

On October 25, 2013, three prominent, Ontario mutual insurance companies got the green light from the Financial Services Commission of Ontario to amalgamate and become The Commonwell Mutual Insurance Group (The Commonwell). With a resultant stronger market position, The Commonwell recognized that the previously separate systems — phone, firewalls, servers, security, LAN and VPN connectivity, and storage — also needed to share one common platform in order to streamline operations, gain efficiencies, and drive a competitive edge.

THE CHALLENGE

From an IT perspective, moving data from three separate legacy IT infrastructures onto one new platform, represents a complex project. In this instance, that complexity intensified with completion of the project required within a 60 day time-frame. Key considerations for successful completion included ensuring effective communications between the different locations of the newly-formed entity; setting up a back-up site to help reduce disaster recovery time to 15 minutes; and providing a scalable solution to accommodate future growth.

Unfazed by the scope of the project or the challenging dead-line, Toronto, Ontario-based IT solutions integrator, HighVail Systems Inc., looked first to learn more about The Commonwell's IT environment. Two technical professionals visited the Lindsay, Ontario site to do a rapid systems assessment

"Bringing three strong companies together was a huge undertaking that has never really happened in the mutual insurance world. At the same time, we wanted to bring as much of the IT infrastructure in-house as possible and expand our expertise here. We wanted more control over our systems, as opposed to outsourcing many aspects of IT, and our CEO wanted to make sure we had the right groundwork in place to accommodate future growth."

— *Brad Waller*
Manager of Infrastructure and
Services, The Commonwell Mutual
Insurance Group

in advance of bidding on the project. The visit helped them understand The Commonwell's business issues and which technologies might best address them — an approach that ultimately differentiated them from other vendors.

HighVail began implementation on November 1, 2013, with the primary goal of completing the project by January 1, 2014, the day The Commonwell would officially open its doors for business.

Fundamental to this initiative was creating a stable back-up site that would ensure The Commonwell was up and running within 15 minutes following any incident or disaster which led to downtime. This alone was ambitious as the current recovery time of any of the three pre-merger companies was 24 hours.

In addition, the ability to share data easily and effectively communicate among the three sites was seen as a key driver of desired efficiencies as well as the ability to enhance the company's competitive market positioning. A further goal of the infrastructure was to also reduce the amount of time IT spent managing the system.

Once HighVail was brought on board, the company's CEO, Bradley Brodkin, and Senior Account Manager, Peter Dozzi, met with The Commonwell's President and CEO, Tim Shauf, at the Lindsay, Ontario site underscoring HighVail' commitment to The Commonwell's success.

THE SOLUTION

With deployment speed and ease of implementation being key factors, HighVail recommended using Cisco and NetApp's Flexpod solution, which comes configured, tested and validated — out of the box. This ready-to-use solution translated to saving weeks of time which would otherwise be spent building a system from the ground up or bringing together different products to create an appropriate solution.

"Bradley and I made sure The Commonwell understood that HighVail is committed to being partners in their success. We saw opportunities for The Commonwell to leverage their new IT environment further, rather than just taking care of their core competencies. We guaranteed we would meet the Group's deadline for the implementation, and that we would continue to partner with them to deliver on their business objectives now and for the longer term."

— Peter Dozzi
Senior Account Manager, HighVail
Systems Inc.

Flexpod's components, including servers, storage and switches are pre-certified to work together— another time-saving feature. As well, use of Flexpod streamlined and simplified The Commonwell's support mechanism, combining support agreements under one umbrella.

As part of the overall project management, HighVail deployed onsite professionals balanced with others working remotely, and dedicated additional people to the project as necessary. The experience level and dedication of HighVail's people, from the CEO to onsite technicians are what helped make the project a success.

In fact, HighVail's CTO, Krys Armatys, worked behind the scenes ensuring that all the resources and talent needed to execute the implementation schedule on time, on budget, and in a way that provided the greatest value to The Commonwell were made available.

THE RESULTS

Significantly reduced deployment timeframe – HighVail was able to complete the implementation and meet The Commonwell's deadline of 60 days.

Reduced recovery time objective (RTO) to 15 minutes – Implementing a combination of NetApp SnapMirror technology, Flexpod Express, NetApp SnapVault software and VMware vCentre Site Recovery Manager helped reduce the RTO to 15 minutes from 24 hours. Bringing back up and recovery in-house is also saving the company $70,000 per year.

Reduce the time IT spends managing the infrastructure – With the flexibility and agility that Flexpod's Unified Computing System delivers, The Commonwell is now able to deploy new systems in a matter of minutes rather than hours or even days, freeing up IT's time to focus on more strategic projects.

"HighVail have excellent people who really know what they're doing and will definitely go out of their way to help you and put in the time required. They were quickly able to adapt to the changes that we were making often from week to week because we were trying to implement so many new technologies. Sometimes things happen that cause you to have to rethink and redesign, and HighVail's response was always to focus on making it work for us."

— *Justin Davidson*
Infrastructure Architect, The
Commonwell Mutual Insurance Group

Conserve storage space – The new infrastructure's NetApp hardware uses deduplication to increase the utilization of storage capacity by 30 to 50 percent.

ABOUT THE COMMONWELL MUTUAL INSURANCE GROUP

The Commonwell is a P&C Mutual company with a strong sense of community and solid grass roots in Ontario since 1895. With offices in Lindsay, Alexandria and Perth, The Commonwell offers residential, commercial, farm, auto and watercraft coverage to customers throughout the province.

ABOUT HIGHVAIL SYSTEMS INC.

Founded in 2003, HighVail empowers technology transformations. We architect, integrate and evolve IT infrastructure. Our experts deliver advice that empowers and technology that enables.

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www.highvail.com

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