

PC Connection gives data center new life with IBM System X



Paul Deguise of PC Connection

For more than 24 years, PC Connection has been meeting the technology needs of businesses, government institutions and consumers. Established in 1982, this direct market reseller has set industry standards for customer service, ultimately growing into a Fortune 1000 company with more than 1,600 employees.

PC Connection recently found itself facing end-of-life issues for critical server environments within its data center. In deciding how to move forward, the company needed to consider the traditional factors, such as performance and support, but they also needed to consider the high visibility of their data center.

“When you’re in technology sales, people want to know what you run in your data center. We have an implicit requirement to stay ahead of the curve,” says Paul Deguise, director of systems operations at PC Connection.

The company decided to go with IBM across the board. Says Deguise, “From a performance standpoint, many of our applications require high-end computing capacity. We were looking for x86 servers that were hardened like a mainframe, and we felt IBM could deliver that.”

Overview

■ Challenge

Update the data center with high-performance servers able to run critical database applications, support a high-traffic Web site and deploy a redesign of a mission-critical sales application

■ Solution

Comprehensive solutions including IBM BladeCenter®, IBM System x™ 2-way, 4-way and 8-way servers; IBM Director, IBM Virtual Machine Manager and 30 redundant virtual machine environments through VMware

■ Key Benefits

Reduced deployment time of a new application environment from more than one day to less than an hour; provided a transparent, reliable environment to support high-capacity Web site needs; exceeded deployment needs of a mission-critical sales application redesign

Exceeding performance expectations

Their first IBM project was to deploy a critical database application on an 8-way IBM System x server (formerly IBM eServer™ xSeries®). “When we brought up the database application, all of the performance numbers were beyond expectations,” says Deguise. PC Connection was off and running on System x.

The company also implemented five redundant System x 8-way servers, each running up to 30 virtual machines through VMware ESX server. Using IBM Director systems management software and IBM Virtual Machine Manager, PC Connection can manage their physical and virtual machines from a single console. Deguise was thrilled with the performance and management gains: “It used to take us one to three days to deploy a new environment. Now it takes less than an hour. It’s astounding.”

Their next major project was a technology refresh for their Web site, a key customer interface. “If the Web site is down or has poor performance, we don’t make a sale,” explains Deguise. PC Connection planned capacity requirements for the site based on historically heavy third and fourth quarter traffic. After implementing the new site using System x servers including clustered 4-ways, Deguise says, “In 2005, we had a fantastic Q3 and Q4 in terms of providing performance and availability to the business. The right horsepower was in place, so there were no issues, no user complaints. It was completely transparent.”

Having established a track record of success on System x, PC Connection embarked on the most ambitious project yet—to reengineer their core sales application. The company’s sales force (more than 700 users) relies on this mission-critical application. As the software product was coming to fruition, the software developers and the hardware engineers came together to discuss requirements. The resulting IBM portfolio was based on a long list of software requirements matched to the hardware available from IBM. With a combination of multiple IBM BladeCenters with 2- and 4-way blade servers and several clustered 4-way System x servers, the result was, in Deguise’s words, “a world-class deployment.”

Continuing the momentum

Staying ahead of the technology curve is a never-ending job, but one that PC Connection looks forward to. Future plans include deploying IBM System x servers for data warehousing and additional Web-based projects.

For more information

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Route 100
Somers, New York 10589
U.S.A.

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