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Success Story

McKesson's RelayHealth Division Reduces Storage Management Costs by 36%



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry
Healthcare

The challenge

Deploy a centralized, flexible, and cost-effective storage solution to support multiterabyte, distributed Oracle® Database farms and business applications.

The solution

NetApp® unified storage was selected to support over 80 Oracle Databases.

Benefits

- 36% reduction in storage management costs
- \$280,000 cost savings over three years for storage hardware and maintenance
- Improved responsiveness to the needs of the business
- Ability to publish storage on an ad hoc basis—in minutes

CUSTOMER PROFILE

RelayHealth, based in Atlanta, Georgia, provides an intelligent network of solutions that improve clinical communication, accelerate care delivery, and drive cash collection by connecting patients, providers, pharmacies, payers, and financial institutions. RelayHealth is a subsidiary of McKesson Corporation, the oldest and largest healthcare services company in the United States. RelayHealth's leading pharmacy-benefits management application, ProPBM®, provides health insurance providers with a robust prescription drug benefits claims processing system to administer claims efficiently and quickly.

THE CHALLENGE

A new approach to data storage

When Tracy Thompson, senior director of Technical Services for RelayHealth, came to his new post in 2006, the organization used Dell-branded EMC storage on the Fibre Channel protocol extensively. "We're a software development shop and also support the hosted application services that we provide to our customers," says Thompson. His group supports multiple databases across a number of McKesson divisions as well as external customers throughout the different SDLC phases. "EMC was handling a bulk of our storage, including QA, development, test, and production environments," he says. This included over 80 Oracle

Databases to support the company's mission-critical Pharmacy Benefit Management (PBM) software application. "It simply required a lot of time and effort to make EMC work. If we wanted to add a host, we had to buy adapters, take the system down, and then do the installation. Also, with some of our EMC deployments, a single point of failure existed, which could potentially take the whole system down. It was unsettling." At the time, EMC was managing approximately 2TB of data.

"We have a small team and run very lean here," continues Thompson. "My system administrators and DBAs support dozens of LOB applications as hosted services and internally, so administering EMC put an extra burden on them. It was complex, costly, and labor intensive, and required ongoing training for my staff."

Thompson tried to expand beyond the Fibre Channel protocol with a homegrown NAS system, but it proved too slow and "essentially became a disk backup system," he says.

"Our goal is to minimize expenses without compromising the quality and availability of our services," Thompson adds. "We needed a storage system that was highly flexible, cost-effective, and easy to manage. We also needed a system that could handle multiple protocols. We wanted to be able to publish

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Tracy Thompson

Senior Director of Technical Services, McKesson RelayHealth

storage quickly to our users and internal teams,” he says. Thompson has deployed storage solutions utilizing Fibre Channel, iSCSI, and other protocols such as NAS-CIFS—from a single, centralized storage system.

THE SOLUTION

A rock-solid storage solution for Oracle Database

McKesson’s RelayHealth replaced all non-production EMC Fibre Channel data storage, including test, QA, and development databases, with NetApp, while also replacing the company’s homegrown NAS solution.

RelayHealth selected NetApp storage largely because of the company’s strong integration with Oracle. “Since we support dozens of Oracle [10g™] Database environments across the company, technology integration was a key factor. After multiple meetings and demos with NetApp and NetApp partner Advanced Systems Group (ASG), we found that Oracle and NetApp were very well aligned. It was clear that they had a strong relationship on the business side as well as the technical side. They had done significant testing, which gave us the confidence to move forward,” says Thompson. “The fact that NetApp could support several protocols

on a single platform, including iSCSI, Fibre Channel, and CIFS/NFS, was a major selling point, as it aligned with our technology strategy.”

Thompson also appreciated NetApp’s simplicity of design and the ability to do more with fewer resources.

While parent company McKesson Corporation is now and has been for many years an EMC shop, Thompson decided to evaluate new storage technology with the goal of improving business performance. “ASG provided a broad overview of the technology landscape and which storage solutions were right for our business. Their input was invaluable, because it offered a broader perspective than we get from typical technology vendors, which included current industry practices across the technology spectrum,” says Thompson. RelayHealth first replaced EMC with a NetApp FAS270C at the company’s Scottsdale, Arizona, facility. A successful deployment there was followed by a NetApp FAS2020C solution in Atlanta supporting 8TB of data and, more recently, a NetApp FAS2050 housing an additional 8TB of storage. NetApp supports over 50 nonproduction Oracle Databases via the iSCSI protocol. In addition, file services are consolidated via CIFS for production, disaster

recovery, user acceptance testing, and internal environments as well as Microsoft® SQL Server™ 2005, which hosts internal applications. Other applications supported by NetApp storage include a policy management application and the company’s mission-critical Pharmacy Benefit Management application, ProPBM. The implementation also includes server virtualization with VMware® and Microsoft Virtual Server. NetApp is supporting five virtual servers and that number is expected to quickly grow in the future.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Saving time and money with a unified storage platform

“NetApp offers tremendous value because it’s allowed us to centralize storage on one platform with a user-friendly system that is easy to manage. We quickly trained our system administrators on NetApp and can now respond much faster to requests from the business and clients,” says Thompson. With NetApp, RelayHealth has reduced its cost per terabyte by 36% while adding the ability to manage applications on multiple protocols. Thompson says the company will realize additional cost savings of \$280,000 for storage hardware and maintenance over three years.



With NetApp, RelayHealth is more responsive to the needs of the business, because Thompson's team can publish storage on an ad hoc basis—within minutes. "We are always looking for ways to improve application performance, system uptime, and manageability of our infrastructure. With NetApp's centralized platform and intuitive interface, system administrators can manage storage without any assistance from a storage administrator," Thompson explains. "If an internal user quickly needs 300GB for some files coming in from a client, we can quickly publish storage to that individual's desktop. The same is true in our ASP business, as we can quickly modify exposed storage as needed for client go-lives and other activities. The flexibility of the system enables us to be more responsive to the business. Also, the use of thin provisioning provides us with the ability to grow with the business and minimize up-front spend."

Upgrades are much more cost-effective, too. "Most IT executives are focused on the bottom line. NetApp provides a highly flexible solution and you can expand with the needs of your business without the need for a 'forklift' upgrade. You simply swap out a cluster head, which is redundant across the system," explains Thompson.

File services consolidation simplifies backup and recovery

File storage at RelayHealth is used by almost every employee to store his or her daily files such as reports, files, e-mail, documents, test plans, and source code. Prior to NetApp, the company backed up this data on local storage across a series of Windows® servers via DFS, which were also used for other business applications. When RelayHealth decided to consolidate Oracle Database environments, it also consolidated file services on NetApp's unified storage architecture, slashing the cost of storing and managing these files. Consolidating file storage also meant that they no longer needed to maintain all the different file servers and DFS. "By using NetApp, we don't have to use DFS for a consolidated view anymore," says Thompson. With NetApp Snapshot™ technology, system administrators are able to back up files easily and frequently, which has minimized the frequency of tape operations. "With NetApp we use Snapshot technology for faster and easier recovery of these files," says Thompson.

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

NetApp Products

NetApp FAS270

NetApp FAS2020C

NetApp FAS2050

Protocols

iSCSI

NAS-CIFS

Fibre Channel

Environment

Applications: Oracle 10g with RAC, Microsoft SQL Server 2005, Citrix Presentation Server, IIS, VMware, Microsoft Virtual Server



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