Flexibility is the key to efficient storage for Callcredit

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John Eggleston, IT director, Callcredit plc

In today's fast moving consumer driven society, potential lenders need swift and constant access to accurate consumer information not only for credit referencing but also to prevent fraud and money laundering.

Rapidly expanding in this field is Callcredit plc, which is jointly owned by leading business information provider D&B and Skipton Building Society.

The main reason for Callcredit's success is its new Web-based consumer credit reference service that gives instant 24x7 access to high quality data online.

As with any organisation of this kind, Callcredit is only as good as the information it holds, which is built into a number of relational databases. Callcredit already holds over 100 million individual records and its target is to reach a steady state of 260 million.

Need for performance

Valuable credit data is the lifeblood of the business and with databases totalling several Terabytes of information, Callcredit needed an immensely powerful, sophisticated and scalable storage solution to meet its increasing storage requirements.

The answer came with HP's new StorageWorks Enterprise Virtual Arrays (EVA), which bring a whole new level of flexibility to the storage arena through their virtualisation technology - a field where HP is the undisputed leader.

Customer at a glance

industry sector: Credit finance

name: Callcredit plc

headquarters: Leeds, UK

founded: 2001

telephone: +44 (0) 113 244 1555

number of employees: 60

URL: www.callcredit.co.uk .plc.uk

Partner at a glance

company: InTechnology plc

headquarter: Harrogate, UK

founded: 1984

telephone: +44 (0)1423 850000

number of employees: 250

annual revenues: £165 million.
€232.5 million

URL: www.intechnology.co.uk

business: Data storage and
management

products: Best of breed storage
solutions from major vendors

Partner at a glance

company: Energis plc

headquarter: London

founded: 1993

telephone: +44 (0) 20 7206 5555

number of employees: 1700

URL: www.energis.com

business: Telecommunications
and Internet services provision

products: Various innovative
and tailored communications
solutions

Answering the ever-growing challenges of accessing and managing huge quantities of business-critical data, virtualisation technology offers one of today's most exciting and beneficial solutions for storage management.

By separating logical data access from physical data access, it allows users to create large storage pools from physical storage. Virtual disks are created from these pools and are allocated to servers on the network as logical storage when needed.

Also, through such features as performance management, distributed sparing, Virtual Capacity-Free Snapshot replication and Virtually Instantaneous Snapclone replication, virtualisation has many advantages over conventional storage management and can dramatically reduce total cost of ownership.

Huge capacity

Callcredit now has two EVA5000s supplied and installed by HP distributor and storage partner InTechnology plc. These EVAs each hold several Terabytes of data, one being situated with the company's hosting partner Energis, which runs Callcredit's on-line system. The second provides the high capacity, high performance storage capability in Callcredit's Bureau. This is used for the data processing services which manipulate the raw data into suitable formats to feed into the databases.

"Our storage requirements have increased dramatically over the last two years," said Callcredit's IT Director, John Eggleston. "We have received an unprecedented amount of support from the industry with the contribution of data. We needed a huge storage system which could achieve high transactional throughput. Flexibility, availability, security, ease of management and compatibility were also key factors.

"Callcredit has a strong relationship with HP. However, this SAN was to form the cornerstone of our processing ability and therefore the requirements went out to tender. We looked at offerings from EMC and IBM but decided to go with HP because of the technological advantages of virtualisation, overall support and fit for our business."

Increased flexibility

Callcredit has been highly impressed with the performance of the EVAs but an equally important factor in the choice of storage network is the flexibility that virtualisation brings.

"Several servers are connected to this storage and having the flexibility to move data around is a major benefit," added Eggleston. "For our Bureau processing we have the flexibility to use Snapclone replication to move databases around at astonishing speed and take online backups with almost zero impact on processing performance."

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"The flexibility of HP's virtualisation technology allows us to be far more creative with our assignment of space. With traditional RAID systems you would create a storage area with a handful of disks and get the performance benefit of reading or writing data across them. The EVA spreads data across every disk regardless of how you carve the storage up, giving the combined performance benefit of reading and writing across over 100 disks simultaneously."

Value for money

A key factor for any purchase is return on investment. Eggleston believes that the management of HP EVAs drastically reduces configuration time and complexity. He adds: "It's all achieved with straightforward drag, drop and point commands through a management station with an intuitive Windows graphical user interface (GUI)."

For Callcredit, that manageability is an important factor for return on investment as are the better use of free space on the SAN and more efficient use of the online spare disks.

On-line resilience and scalability

"Callcredit uniquely offers the customer a 24 hour service across the whole year," added Eggleston. "The storage solution we required had to be highly resilient, having no single point of failure and that is exactly what the EVA gives us. It provides virtual RAID for hard drive resilience, hot standby disks, redundant power supplies and multiple storage processors.

"Nothing stands still within Callcredit therefore scalability is also a significant requirement and it's one of the key advantages with EVA because we can scale and remain online. There is no downtime involved with adding more discs - we have the ability to physically increase capacity without affecting service.

"The EVAs are capable of seamless and rapid scaling which enables more efficient processing. This, combined with their performance, gives a highly available and wonderfully responsive service for our customers. The EVA has proved to be an excellent purchase and we are now considering buying a third EVA for Callcredit's sister company, EuroDirect."

Technology Highlights

- HP StorageWorks Enterprise Virtual Array 5000 with world leading virtualisation technology

Why HP?

- HP's Enterprise Virtual Arrays met all the storage needs of the company.

- They were compatible with Callcredit's HP partnership strategy.

- The EVA is an attractively priced product, improving cost of ownership.

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Challenge

- Online credit reference agency Callcredit relies totally on its huge databases of credit history information.

- Due to data size and processing requirements, it needed a powerful and flexible new solution.

- It also needed high availability, security, ease of management and low overheads.

Solution

- Callcredit bought two HP StorageWorks Enterprise Virtual Arrays (EVA).

- One is housed with its hosting partner Energis running the online credit referencing system.

- The second is a storage array used for bureau processing.

Results

- Because of the flexibility offered by EVA storage, Callcredit has a more efficient system that also saves money.

- This offers easier management and scalability, greater speed, high availability and strong security.

- The result is that Callcredit can improve customer service and continue to grow its business.

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