

SIMPSON & MARWICK SOLICITORS

U.K. Legal Firm Cuts Cost of Hardware by 80 Per Cent with Virtualised Server Environment

Overview

Country or Region: United Kingdom
Industry: Legal

Customer Profile

Simpson & Marwick is a law firm specialising in litigation and residential property. It employs Scotland's largest team of partner-led litigators whose work includes personal injury actions and dealing with liability claims.

Business Situation

Simpson & Marwick wanted a faster, more flexible business continuity plan that would better protect company and existing client data, and help the organisation win new contracts.

Solution

It took advantage of Microsoft® Software Assurance to upgrade to a virtualised server system based on Windows Server® 2008 and Hyper-V™ technology.

Benefits

- Cuts hardware costs
- Reduces energy consumption
- Provides business continuity
- Increases IT agility
- Supports flexible testing
- Increases ROI
- Frees hardware
- Offers secure roadmap

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Graham Herd, IT Manager, Simpson & Marwick

The IT team at Simpson & Marwick—one of Scotland's leading commercial litigation law firms—wanted to support its business continuity plan with a faster, more flexible technology environment. The team chose Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Exactive to deploy the Windows Server® 2008 operating system with its integrated Hyper-V™ virtualisation technology. The virtualised environment not only supports a more robust disaster recovery strategy, but it is also helping the business cut its hardware costs by 80 per cent, while energy consumption has fallen by 4,075 watts. What's more, the virtualised environment has helped the business make the most of the company's Microsoft licensing entitlements and maximise return on investment.

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Situation

Simpson & Marwick is one of Scotland’s leading commercial litigation solicitors and dispute law firms. Winner of the Litigation Firm of the Year 2007 prize awarded by The Independent Law Awards of Scotland, the company employs 48 partners, associates, and consultants based in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee, and London. The business relies on technology to run its case and practice management systems. Employees also depend on day-to-day business productivity software, including spreadsheets, e-mail, and word processing.

Until recently, the IT team at Simpson & Marwick managed a traditional hardware environment comprising about 22 Dell PowerEdge servers running Microsoft® Windows® 2000 Server. Each server typically ran a single application from business productivity solutions such as Microsoft Exchange Server 2003, to the company’s case and practice management systems. So every time the business or the IT team wanted to deploy a new application they had to acquire a server, costing about £2,000 (U.S.\$3,270).

Graham Herd, IT Manager at Simpson & Marwick, says: “Under this arrangement, we had to apply for the budget and then wait for the delivery of the new server, which could take up to two weeks.”

While the acquisition of hardware helped the IT team to meet its immediate challenges, the growing number of devices presented Herd and his colleagues with a number of issues. “First and foremost, it was starting to undermine our business continuity strategy. We had tape backup, but we didn’t have the spare server capacity and

the time to provide quick restores,” says Herd.

Herd also had to provide this information when Simpson & Marwick tendered for new business. “Most clients expect us to have a disaster recovery strategy in place. While we could guarantee the integrity and safety of data, we couldn’t claim to have an entirely seamless backup system,” he says. In addition, there were concerns about energy consumption and overheating. Herd was also on the point of investing in an air conditioning unit—an investment of up to £3,000 (U.S.\$4,900)—to reduce the risk of hardware failure.

Overall, Herd and his team had the feeling that they were running to stand still. “We knew that we had the potential to support the business actively, but the existing set-up was holding us back,” says Herd. A good example of where the team felt it could improve the performance of the business was through the deployment of more up-to-date Microsoft business productivity software. “Under our existing Software Assurance agreement we had the opportunity to upgrade from Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 to Microsoft Exchange Server 2007, for example, but we lacked the flexible hardware environment that would guarantee a seamless upgrade—critical for employees who are often working on cases late at night or over the weekend,” says Herd.

Solution

The priority for Herd and his team was to deploy a robust business continuity solution. He says: “In the past, we considered the deployment of failover servers, but it was difficult to justify the business case and it didn’t solve the

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ongoing problem of space in the computer room.” So when Hyper-V™ virtualisation software became available with the release of Windows Server® 2008, Herd saw the opportunity to take advantage of the operating system upgrade available under the company’s existing Microsoft Software Assurance for Volume Licensing agreement.

Working closely with Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Exactive, which specialises in providing managed services, core infrastructure and unified communications solutions, the Simpson & Marwick IT team considered the technology options. Herd says: “We looked closely at VMware and we concluded that any gaps in functionality were insignificant taking into account that Hyper-V is available at no cost in Windows Server 2008. We also have confidence that Microsoft will follow up quickly with new releases and additional features.”

Herd was also keen to take advantage of the simplest possible support framework. He says: “Based on our past experience with Microsoft, we knew that we would get focused, unified support for both our virtualisation environment and the upgrade to the new operating system. That’s not something you can always count on when you pick technologies from different suppliers.” What’s more, Hyper-V was released a year before Herd made his decision. “By looking at deployments in similar-sized organisations, we could see that the software was stable and proven,” he says.

Working closely with a team of experts from Exactive, Herd and his colleagues deployed four Dell PowerEdge R710 rack servers. One of the first applications to be set up in the virtualised environment

was Microsoft Exchange Server 2007. “The deployment of Hyper-V gave us the impetus to upgrade other applications as well as move existing applications into the new system,” says Herd.

Microsoft System Center Virtual Machine Manager 2008, which provides a single console to monitor, optimise, and provision multiple servers, played a significant role. “It meant that we were able to manage physical servers at the same time as our virtual resources, through one unified console. It was extremely effective when we migrated software from older servers to the virtualised environment,” says Herd.

Benefits

With the help of Exactive, the deployment of Hyper-V has transformed the performance of the Simpson & Marwick IT team. Firstly, Herd and his colleagues have succeeded in significantly reducing hardware costs and energy consumption. Secondly, they have a robust, modern business continuity solution, and they’re putting the flexible testing environment to good use by increasing return on investment (ROI) on their existing licensing entitlements. But, perhaps most importantly, the IT team is now actively supporting the Simpson & Marwick business with software that provides better collaboration and communication between the company’s employees and its clients.

Reduces Hardware Costs by 80 Per Cent

When it comes to ROI in the virtualised environment, the figures speak for themselves. The four Dell PowerEdge R710 rack servers cost around £2,500 (U.S.\$4,070) each. Herd estimates that he will be able to run approximately 30

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virtual machines in this environment. Purchasing the equivalent number of physical servers would have required an investment of about £60,000 (U.S.\$97,210), which means the company has cut costs by more than 80 per cent.

Cuts Energy Consumption by 50 Per Cent a Year

The IT department at Simpson & Marwick now runs 15 virtual machines consuming about 295 watts in total. If the potential 30 virtual machines were running on separate physical servers, power consumption would be two times greater or about 9,290 watts. This equates to a 50 per cent reduction in energy bills.

Provides State-of-the-Art Business Continuity

The virtualised environment, in conjunction with a new storage area network and hard disk backup, provides Simpson & Marwick with a robust business continuity infrastructure. Herd says: “Hyper-V delivers high availability for physical host and virtual machines. Windows Server 2008 provides robust business continuity, based on network load balancing and clustering.”

In addition, Herd and his team have complete confidence that they can support the organisation when it comes to tendering for new business. “With many potential clients in finance and insurance, we have to prove the highest standards of data integrity. Thanks to Hyper-V, we can deliver that peace of mind to our customers,” says Herd.

Increases Responsiveness and Agility of IT Team

The Simpson & Marwick IT team is now much more agile and responsive to the needs of the business. In the past, it

would have taken two weeks from getting the budget signed off for a server, to delivery and deployment. “Using Hyper-V, we can set up a virtual machine in two hours or less,” says Herd. As a result, applications can be deployed or ported from the physical environment in direct response to the needs of Simpson & Marwick staff.

The System Center Virtual Machine Manager 2008 console plays a critical role here, helping Herd and his team manage the rapid porting of applications to the virtualised environment. “One of the greatest challenges we face is making sure that business continues as normal for employees. With System Center Virtual Machine Manager 2008 and Hyper-V we can test and deploy existing applications in the new environment without the business missing a beat,” says Herd.

Enhances Productivity and Morale

When it comes to testing and deploying software, one of the biggest challenges facing Herd is finding the time and the hardware to test and deploy new solutions. In the past, this meant that he often had to wait until late in the evening or until the weekend for the technology to become available. “When you have lawyers using business-critical systems late into the night, you can’t schedule downtime at your convenience. Now I can use the virtualised environment to carry out testing during working hours. Live deployment still has to take place at a time that’s convenient for staff, but at least three-quarters of the work is already done,” says Herd.

Improves Software Return on Investment

A more flexible virtualised testing environment is also helping Simpson &

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Marwick make better use of its licensing entitlement as a Microsoft Software Assurance customer. As well as the move to Windows Server 2008, the company has migrated to Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 for scheduling and e-mail. “End users are especially pleased with the improved mail management functionality and the compatibility with mobile devices,” says Herd.

Herd is now keen to take full advantage of other communication and collaboration tools. “So much information is locked up in the minds of lawyers and their colleagues. While they rely on what’s set down in the statute books, there are huge benefits to be had by sharing experience and knowledge gained through individual cases. We see Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 potentially playing an important role in employee collaboration and knowledge sharing. The new testing environment means that I can test the software and demonstrate the benefits to decision makers in the business,” he says.

Frees Hardware for New Communications Systems

Herd and his team have also found a smart use for some of the physical servers made redundant by the virtualised environment. Employees in Glasgow are moving to a new office where they’ll use Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2—to be deployed with the help of Exactive—for telephony, instant messaging, presence awareness, and video and audio conferencing. Not all the features of Office Communications Server 2007 run in a virtualised environment, so Herd plans to use the spare hardware capacity to support this deployment.

“Office Communications Server 2007 is a great product and through its presence awareness features and other integrated real-time communications tools it can transform the way people work. It’s been much easier to make a business case thanks to our spare hardware, and we believe that once the new Glasgow office goes online, other locations will be keen to take advantage of the same communications technology,” he says.

Provides Secure Software Roadmap

Taking into account all these benefits, Herd is confident that he made the right decision by choosing Microsoft to be the company’s virtualisation software provider. “Microsoft doesn’t do things by halves. Hyper-V is available at no cost through our upgrade entitlement to Windows Server 2008, and we have complete confidence that Hyper-V will include even more powerful functionality in future releases,” he says.

For More Information

For further information about Microsoft products and services, please visit:

www.microsoft.com/uk

or call 0870 60 10 100*

For hearing impaired customers with a Minicom, contact: 0870 50 30 400*

*Lines are open 8am–6pm, Monday to Friday. Please note, numbers prefixed 0870 will be charged at national call rates. For details of national call rate charges, please contact your telecommunications provider.

For more information about Exactive products and services, call 0844 561 1577 or visit the Web site at: www.exactive.co.uk

For more information about Simpson & Marwick products and services, call (44) 131 557 1545 or visit the Web site at: www.simpmar.co.uk

Microsoft Virtualization

Microsoft virtualization is an end-to-end strategy that can profoundly affect nearly every aspect of the IT infrastructure management lifecycle. It can drive greater efficiencies, flexibility, and cost effectiveness throughout your organisation. From accelerating application deployments; to ensuring systems, applications, and data are always available; to taking the hassle out of rebuilding and shutting down servers and desktops for testing and development; to reducing risk, slashing costs, and improving the agility of your entire environment—virtualization has the power to transform your infrastructure, from the data center to the desktop.

For more information about Microsoft virtualization solutions, go to: www.microsoft.com/virtualization

Microsoft Server Product Portfolio

For more information about the Microsoft server product portfolio, go to: www.microsoft.com/servers/default.aspx

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft System Center Virtual Machine Manager 2008
 - Windows Server 2008 Standard

- Technologies
 - Hyper-V