

## A Virtual Success with VMware ABC Fine Wine & Spirits Looks to Virtualization for Efficiencies and ROI



### Highlights:

#### PROBLEMS

- Traditional disaster recovery system
- Underutilized server and storage resources
- Increasing time demands on IT staff
- Network complexity
- Unable to respond quickly to dynamic business requirements
- Unattractive ROI on deployed systems
- Oversized solutions and high associated soft costs

#### SOLUTIONS

As a result of Champion's services and solution offerings, ABC Fine Wine & Spirits has been able to recognize these results:

- Robust and flexible multi-site disaster recovery
- Excellent resource usage through virtualization and SAN technologies
- Simplification of IT administration, allocation and provisioning
- Rapid response time at the infrastructure level
- Improved ROI and cost-avoidance
- Designed for "pay as you grow"

For Brian McConnell and his IT staff at ABC Fine Wine & Spirits, the past five months with their new VMware virtual environment have been like "toys on Christmas morning."

The senior network administrator is truly enjoying all of the flexibility and time-saving aspects of the new platform designed and implemented by Champion Solutions Group for ABC, a retail chain with 150 store locations across Florida and headquartered in Orlando. McConnell likes nothing better than telling the stories of virtual server provisioning taking 10 minutes instead of the traditional month to procure and install new physical hardware. And a positive ROI? Oh yes, even after only five months. They reduced the datacenter footprint, lowered hardware maintenance costs and brought application provisioning time down through consolidation.

For ABC, the shift to virtualization began in late 2005 when McConnell and his staff talked with IBM Global Services about ABC's desire for a paperless office solution and new security initiatives. IBM's DB2® Content Manager offering, as well as a need for a new disaster recovery approach, led to discussions about a centralized and consolidated SAN environment. Champion Solutions Group, an IBM Premier Business Partner and recent IBM Beacon Award winner, came highly recommended by IBM to develop the solution that would meet ABC's business initiatives.

#### Multiple Needs, Multiple Issues

With ABC's transportation, warehouse and core financial control on redundant IBM iSeries technology and a need for more cost effective storage space for their Intel-based back-office systems, McConnell was looking for a way to leverage the Microsoft Windows® 2003 platform for the firm's paperless and video security system.

In addition, disaster recovery had become an urgent priority. Like many companies in Florida after recent hurricane seasons, ABC was taking a measured look at its disaster recovery processes and options. The company's primary datacenter was already in a fortified structure, which proved itself during Hurricane Charley in 2004. "We took a direct hit from a strong Category 2 storm," said McConnell, "and basically we only lost some of our phone lines. We were without power for seven days, but a backup generator provided power the entire time. Our systems were up and running, but it was still all in one physical location. We needed to come up with something where we could have identical systems in a second location."

Enter Champion Solutions Group. McConnell and his team were invited to Champion headquarters in Boca Raton, Florida to explore IBM technologies in Champion's Business Partner Innovation Center designed for product demonstrations and proof-of-concepts. "You know, other people just like to send you a brochure that says here's what we can do. But we want to touch it, feel it, really see what a technology can do," McConnell said. "We spent two days down there with Champion's engineers. They spent a great deal of time just asking us questions about our company and our systems and how it all worked together, so they could find the best solution for us. And they did!"

Champion recommended the high-performance IBM System X x3950 4-way servers (IBM xSeries 460 servers), two for the primary datacenter and two for the new disaster recovery datacenter. "Then we started talking about virtualization," McConnell said. "I had been exposed to it on the server side [VMware GSX], but never at the enterprise level [VMware ESX]."

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*Brian McConnell, Senior Network Administrator – ABC Fine Wine & Spirits*



It is a totally different way of doing things than we were comfortable with. It's easy to say, 'why are we going down this road just for more hard drive space?' But once you do all the analysis and once you 'get it,' it makes all the sense in the world. It would really be tough to go back to the old way now."

#### **Smaller, Faster, Better**

The disaster recovery need was a solid fit for the virtual environment solution. Matt Bratton, Champion's lead VMware-certified engineer for the ABC project said, "Once we got ABC into the virtual world, things became much more flexible, portable and better utilized.

"VMware and the new dual-redundant IBM Storage Subsystem & McDATA Fibre Channel switches allowed ABC's IT team to consolidate physical server hardware into single file images of their servers' original hard drives. If a disaster causes a massive failure at the primary site, they just have to copy their image files on another similar virtualization platform and power them on," Bratton said. "They will have an exact image of their production system without having to back up their user data to tape, purchase identical hardware, reinstall operating systems, applications, configurations, etc. In the case of a major disaster like a hurricane, they have pristine copies of all their servers and user data in the form of files, which could be taken with them if evacuation is necessary. They could even take the files to another VMware hosting platform in a completely different city, swing their network over and bring their critical systems back online and be up and running."

For the day-to-day operations, ABC also determined that its new virtualization platform with the SAN is better leveraging its technology investment. With more efficient resource utilization and a coveted 99.99% uptime with VMotion™, McConnell is discovering his busy staff has time to take on new business initiatives instead of maintaining 40 disparate hardware systems. For example, "The engineers installing our new IBM DB2 Content Manager and On Demand systems called with their list of requirements. They said we'd need four servers, a lot of storage and asked, 'When do you think you can get all this stuff in?' We

kind of chuckled and said, 'We'll have it ready this afternoon,'" McConnell remembered. "THAT was when we knew we were in a virtual environment. It saves so much time."

Though the project is not even a year old, McConnell is already seeing measurable ROI. By reducing his server footprint from 40 to 4, he eliminated the hardware maintenance costs, power, cooling, network and risk associated with the migrated physical servers. "And talk to me in a year," he said. "There are going to be more and more ways this saves us money. I can already see the time it saves. And time is money!"

#### **Skills Transfer is Critical to Success**

Critical to the ongoing success of the new technologies was the skills transfer process, a standard value-add of Champion solutions. "The first step for a smooth VMware implementation is a detailed planning session well in advance of the start date so everyone's expectations are met and we all have an opportunity to discover any 'gotchas,'" explained Bratton.

"This was really invaluable," McConnell said. "On the enterprise level, everyone's needs are different. Matt came in and said, 'let me see your network, let me see how it flows.' We came away with a project plan of what was going to happen when, and what we needed to get ready for each interdependent process. This approach absolutely eliminated any problems during the implementation and meant we could get so much more done during our allotted time."

Once the process began, Bratton walked them through every step of the process. Particularly daunting, according to McConnell, was the process of moving the actual servers from physical home to a virtual home – called P2V. "We were literally hanging over Matt's shoulder watching," McConnell admitted. "It was so new to us. Matt would P2V one of our physical servers, demonstrating the technique to us. After he completed several migrations, he had us doing them, while he was right there to guide us. By the time Matt finished the implementation, we felt totally comfortable that we could handle our whole virtualization & SAN operation. Champion's technical delivery of the solution was perfectly executed, and the physical and logical layout was beautiful—totally a work of art!"

McConnell said the concept of putting all your eggs in one basket has always scared him, and the prospect of one piece of hardware running 10 to 20 servers was unnerving. "I thought what would happen if something were to fail with this hardware?" he asked. "But once I experienced the power of VMotion™ and VirtualCenter™ technology; that worry was right out the window, because VMotion™ moves running virtual servers right to its sister hardware, without any interruption to the end-user. If your hardware can access the SAN, you can run it on any similar Intel-based hardware platform. It takes that basket and really expands it to multiple baskets, without caring where the eggs are."

One key measuring stick for the success of the Champion implementation of the VMware project was its transparency to the business. "This was a total restructuring of our server and storage infrastructure," said McConnell. "The process was six weeks long and no one else outside of IT even knew it was going on. Champion executed this project efficiently, professionally and exceeded our expectations. There was absolutely no downtime for our users and, frankly, my boss is thrilled. When I need to add things to our growing infrastructure, Champion will be my first call."

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