Value-Added Reseller Differentiates Service with Cloud Tool

LaSalle Solutions moved its mission-critical asset management service to Unified Computing System C-Series Servers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LASALLE SOLUTIONS

- Lifecycle Asset Management
- Rosemont, Illinois
- 80 Employees

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Create excellent customer experience for cloud service
- Increase business agility
- Support business growth

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco Unified Computing System C-Series Rack-Mount Servers, used to host customer-facing LAMP tool and critical business applications

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Built foundation for 100 percent virtualized application environment
- Postponed capital outlay for new storage array
- Provisioned hardware for new customer environment in one day

Business Challenge

LaSalle Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of MB Financial located near Chicago, Illinois, is a Cisco value-added reseller and also provides lifecycle management services for technology assets such as switches and routers. To differentiate itself, LaSalle offers a unique cloud-based service, called LAMP, which streamlines asset lifecycle management, including hardware acquisition, equipment leasing, contract maintenance and management, and disposition.

LAMP customers regard the service as mission-critical. Some of these customers have thousands or tens of thousands of network devices around the world, and knowing their current location, configuration, and financing status is essential to keeping the business running and costs down.

As LaSalle prepared to release a new version of LAMP, the company decided to upgrade the hosting platform to prepare for future growth. “When you extend an application to your customers, it has to be available 24 x 7 and deliver consistently high performance,” says Steven Robb, vice president and general manager for LaSalle Solutions. “Flexibility and stability were our most important platform criteria. We also wanted to work with a company that had a clear vision for cloud computing.”

Solution

After evaluating several leading computing platforms, LaSalle selected the Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS) C-Series Rack-Mount Server. “Our evaluation process focused less on technical specifications and more on the vendor’s architectural strategy and vision,” Robb says. “The Cisco UCS C-Series roadmap is moving in the same direction as LaSalle, toward virtualization and cloud computing.”

LaSalle initially implemented four servers, two Cisco® UCS C200 M1s and two Cisco UCS C210 M1s. Currently the servers connect to the Ethernet network through Cisco Catalyst® 2950 Switches. When LaSalle adds an EMC storage array, LaSalle will replace the existing switch with a Cisco Nexus® 5000 Switch with Fibre Channel over Ethernet (FCoE) support, reducing cabling and switch port requirements.

The servers operate VMware ESX, and the 4TB of on-board storage is ample for 15 virtual machines. When LaSalle adds a new storage array, the company will take advantage of Cisco Extended Memory Technology to increase server density. LaSalle has already migrated 80 percent of its applications to the Cisco UCS C-Series servers, and is well on the way to its goal of 100 percent.

Results

Solid Platform for Mission-Critical Cloud Service

Each of LaSalle's LAMP customers, which include members of the Fortune 50, benefit from the high availability and performance of the Cisco UCS C-Series Servers. "LAMP is extremely important to our business, enabling us to keep track of thousands of network devices from one interface," says Robert MacDonald, network engineer for Haworth, Inc., a leading designer and manufacturer of office furniture that operates in 120 countries and had net sales of US$1.65 billion in 2008. "The fact that I've never had to inquire about availability demonstrates that their server platform is robust."

The stability of the platform also enabled LaSalle to confidently introduce a new service, LAMP Mobile, which extends the tool to customers using smartphones and mobile devices such as the Cisco Cius and Apple iPad.

Business Flexibility

Cisco UCS and VMware give LaSalle the agility to quickly introduce new services that differentiate the customer experience or generate revenue. For example, when one of LaSalle's largest customers asked to rebrand the LAMP service to offer to its own clients, LaSalle was able to quickly meet the request. LaSalle created a separate virtual environment for the customer, and then replicated the application into that environment so that it could be customized, tested, and separately backed up. "With the Cisco UCS, we provisioned the hardware in one day, and our developers had a fully functional site in 30 days," says Eddie Garcia, director of engineering and collaboration for LaSalle Systems. "Using any other server platform, the same result would have taken months, and we might not have been able to agree to the customer request because of the resource requirements." Garcia adds that LaSalle had the confidence to create a new virtual environment on the Cisco UCS because server performance to date has been rock-solid.

> "Flexible storage options, including SAS and SATA drives and solid state storage, will let us use the Cisco UCS C-Series for every type of server role, including clustered VMware ESX hosts, standalone hosts for testing, enterprise database engines, and departmental network-attached storage."
>
> **—Steven Robb, Vice President and General Manager, LaSalle Solutions**

IT Flexibility

The Cisco UCS C-Series has given LaSalle a clear migration path from older 32-bit servers to a new virtual environment. Virtualization is an important part of LaSalle's business plan because it minimizes the cost of growth. From 2007 to 2010, the rate of growth for the LAMP service increased from about one new customer a month to 10 to 15 customers a month.

Built-in support for VMware will reduce the number of new servers LaSalle needs to accommodate more customers and applications, as well as the associated data center space, power, and cooling. And as LaSalle adds more Cisco UCS servers, management overhead will not increase, because the administrator can use Cisco UCS Manager to manage all servers from a single interface.

The Cisco UCS even enabled LaSalle to defer a large capital expense. The company knew that it would need to upgrade storage capacity in a year or two, and planned to implement an EMC storage array. “With the Cisco UCS C-Series servers and fiber channel connectivity, we were able to start with 4TB of internal storage, knowing we could migrate to shared storage when we had a better idea of how much capacity we’d need,” says Robb. “Flexible storage options, including SAS and SATA drives and solid state storage, will let us use the Cisco UCS C-Series for every type of server role, including clustered VMware ESX hosts, standalone hosts for testing, enterprise database engines, and departmental network-attached storage.”

When LaSalle does transition to shared storage, the company plans to use the internal storage for backup copies of virtual machines and local swapping.

PRODUCT LIST

Data Center

- Cisco Unified Computing System C200 M1 Rack-Mount Server
- Cisco Unified Computing System C210 M1 Rack-Mount Server

To learn more about Cisco Unified Computing System, go to www.cisco.com/go/ucs.

To find out more about Cisco Data Center Business Advantages, go to www.cisco.com/go/dc.

Next Steps

LaSalle expects to take full advantage of the Cisco UCS C-Series architecture and VMware to realize even more benefits of virtualization. For example, after adopting EMC storage, LaSalle plans to use VMware vMotion to move virtual machines between servers, enabling the LAMP cloud service to continue operating even if one of the servers needs an upgrade. “The Cisco Nexus 1000V Switch will enable each virtual machine’s security and networking policies to travel with it as it moves between servers,” says Garcia.

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