Success Story

Canadian Utility Company Improves Customer Service and Cash Flow with SAP on FlexPod

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry
Utilities

The Challenge
Maintain excellent customer service and reduce risk by providing predictable performance for SAP® Utilities, SAP CRM, and other business-critical workloads.

The Solution
Migrate applications and databases to a FlexPod® environment and use storage quality-of-service (QoS) policies in the NetApp® clustered Data ONTAP® operating system to meet performance requirements.

Benefits
• Enables consistent revenue collection, improving cash flow
• Improves customer service and call center efficiency
• Reduces SAP storage TCO by 50%
• Accelerates SAP upgrades and deployments by 25%

An energy powerhouse
With its vast natural resources, Canada is already the fifth largest producer of energy in the world. It also has enormous potential for renewables, with wide expanses that could be used for wind and solar power generation. Provincial governments have jurisdiction over the generation and production of electricity, which is sold to the public through regulated utilities.

This Canadian utility company uses SAP applications to keep its business moving. SAP Customer Relationship Management (CRM) provides account information to customer service professionals in the utility’s call center, while SAP Utilities (IS-U) automates billing and revenue collection. The utility also depends on SAP business intelligence applications for revenue forecasting.

The Challenges
Achieving consistent, predictable performance
The utility must avoid downtime for SAP at all costs, and maintaining consistent performance is equally important. Each SAP application has a “runbook,” or nightly compilation procedure, that must complete within a predictable time window. The IS-U runbook is directly tied to revenue collection. If it does not complete on time, billing delays can occur and cash flow could be impacted. The CRM runbook is linked to customer satisfaction. If call center employees cannot access customers’ account information, customer service grinds to a halt.

When upgrading to new versions of SAP applications, the utility must make sure that runbooks still complete within time windows that are acceptable to the business. New releases offer compelling features but often demand more compute and storage resources.

The Solution
Converged infrastructure lowers risk
As the utility began the testing and development cycles for a major SAP upgrade, it decided to virtualize SAP applications with VMware® vSphere® as part of a move to a converged infrastructure. It turned to its trusted technology advisor, Long View, for recommendations. Long View helped the utility evaluate two competing converged infrastructure solutions—FlexPod and Vblock—to determine which would best support the utility’s future growth.
Business Benefits

Together, Long View and the utility determined that FlexPod, which includes NetApp storage systems and Cisco® data center and networking solutions, was a better fit for the utility’s business requirements and IT skill sets. The utility also wanted to virtualize its FlexPod environment using VMware vSphere. A long-time NetApp customer, the utility was impressed with the ease of using NetApp storage. NetApp also offered three technologies that were instrumental in reducing risk for SAP and other applications:

• Secure multi-tenancy: Storage virtual machine technology in NetApp clustered Data ONTAP allows administrators to configure completely separate storage environments for applications sharing the same FlexPod system. This will enable the utility to move its Genesys Contact Center application into the FlexPod clustered storage environment, improving call center efficiency and uptime.

• Quality of service (QoS): Storage QoS policies in NetApp clustered Data ONTAP can be used to throttle rogue workloads and give priority to SAP runbooks. Without QoS, it would be difficult for the utility to guarantee the necessary throughput and IOPS to keep its SAP runbook times consistent.

• Intelligent caching: When the utility introduced NetApp Flash Cache™ PCIe-based caching, the SAP runbook time decreased by two hours, providing the headroom it needed for the next SAP upgrade.

The utility also benefits from NetApp storage efficiency and data protection technologies. Deduplication and thin cloning help maximize storage utilization, while array-based replication and disk-to-disk backup protect SAP data for disaster recovery purposes.

Reducing storage TCO for SAP by 50%

The FlexPod Datacenter solution was deployed, configured, and ready for SAP testing and development in just two weeks, meeting a crucial business deadline. Moving SAP to FlexPod helped speed testing and quality assurance, accelerating the entire upgrade process by 25% and giving the utility faster time to value for new SAP features. Overall, moving to FlexPod reduced storage and data management costs for SAP by 50% and cut the underlying hardware footprint in half. Meanwhile, the utility is spending much less time, power, and cooling supporting FlexPod compared to what it spent with its previous systems.

Keeping customers happy and cash flowing

With FlexPod, the utility can anticipate, automate, and manage SAP performance even as application demands increase. As the environment grows, the utility can scale its storage nondisruptively while retaining full application and data mobility. That means it can enable uninterrupted customer service and consistent revenue collection—two primary goals for every utility.

About Long View

Long View is one of the most powerful IT solutions and services companies in North America, with offices across the continent. With a clear focus on combining business and technology through our Hybrid IT solutions, including cloud, IT infrastructure, managed services, and end user support, Long View is able to define and customize what the future of IT looks like for its clients. Innovative, flexible, cost-effective, and business focused...that’s Long View.