Corporate Express
Industry: Retail – B2B
(Office Supplies/Services)
Solutions: Procurement, Virtualization, Data Center

Long View Success Story

Long View Designs a Remote Access, Virtualized Data Center to Rescue Corporate Express from the Cold

CLIENT OVERVIEW

Corporate Express, Inc. was one of the world’s largest business-to-business suppliers of essential office and computer products and services with 2006 sales of approximately $7.8 billion in North America. Core offerings, apart from office and computer supplies, included office furniture, document and print management, and products related to imaging and promotions. Corporate Express, Inc., once a wholly owned subsidiary of Corporate Express, NV, an international business services and distribution group, was acquired by Staples in July, 2008.

Prior to its acquisition, Corporate Express had operations in 18 countries across North and South America, Europe, and Australia, as well as exclusive strategic partnerships in 11 more countries in Europe and Asia. Corporate Express’ North American operations had more than 200 facilities that included 38 distribution centers, and employed 10,775 people. Staples, the world’s largest office products company ($27 billion in sales), serves businesses of all sizes and consumers in 27 countries.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

In 2006, Corporate Express had centralized many of its back-office functions, including its core data center and custom ERP & Ecommerce applications, to its US headquarters in Broomfield, Colorado. This single facility, employing approx. 600 people, supported all the company’s customer calls and electronic orders. On December 1, a powerful snowstorm paralyzed the city of Broomfield and brought Corporate Express’ international call center operations to a halt. Call center employees were unable to get to work and, as a result, Corporate Express was unable to process orders for its clients and suffered the immediate loss of related revenues.

Having weathered a series of tremendous storms, the largest single risk to the company’s business continuity, Corporate Express set out to ensure such a situation never took place again. The company needed a Disaster Recovery solution tied to its enterprise-class data center that would allow Corporate Express managers and other call center staff to work from home in the event of such an emergency. To this end, Long View Systems (Long View) was invited to propose solutions for the so-called Home Agent project.

APPROACH & SOLUTION OVERVIEW

With the winter season fast approaching, Long View assisted Corporate Express through the completion of a project evaluation, Proof of Concept (POC), and pilot phase in less than 90 days. Long View’s talented data center and virtualization experts took time to properly explain the how the technology involved worked and to best utilize it. Corporate Express agents were provided Wyse thin clients and Leostream Connection Broker.

- Secure, remote access to an enterprise-class, virtualized data center via Wyse thin clients and Leostream Connection Broker
- Design and implementation of a VMware powered, Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI)
- High performance, high availability Dell servers using industry standard NetApp storage

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There were some key challenges in implementing this solution, including the need to:

• Minimize bandwidth requirements on the company's ISP
• Maintain existing security standards
• Minimize capital investment in the homes of remote agents
• Hide the overall complexity of the system
• Effectively manage end user roles and desktop pools while working around an existing IP-SEC infrastructure

With limited testing time and the lack of comprehensive business process documentation, Long View's system architects worked hand-in-hand with Corporate Express staff to meet these challenges and effectively mitigate the cumulative effect of many smaller technical challenges on the company's end-user perception.

BUSINESS RESULTS & BENEFITS

Following the Home Agent project pilot, Corporate Express rolled it out for 400 users who would continue to receive and process customer orders over the phone, maintaining business operations regardless of the weather. Peak days saw an average of 70 concurrent users without any degradation of the data center's resources. By replacing the company's internal desktop system as part of a lease refresh, Corporate Express saved nearly 50% more than the costs of a typical fat client setup.

By making the transition to a secure, remotely accessible enterprise-class virtual data center, Corporate Express was well positioned to face its future business needs. The cost benefits of server consolidation as a result of virtualization include the offset of additional server purchase and maintenance costs as well as significant energy savings and reduced space requirements. An automated, always-on data center also allows for streamlining the management of IT environments while delivering improved services levels and business continuity. Administration tasks such as live migration, provisioning, capacity management, and automated patching can be performed under a unified management system.

CONCLUSION

Long View's partnership with Corporate Express saw the rapid design and deployment of a comprehensive data center and data recovery solution that would serve as the key attribute of the company's ongoing business continuity and customer support efforts. Much more than simply throwing hardware at the problem, Long View followed a proven methodology of cooperation and understanding of its clients unique operating requirements in order to ensure the greatest possible success.

PARTNERS

For more information on Procurement, Virtualization, and Data Center Solutions, please contact us.

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