

Education Company Moves Data Center to the Cloud, Saves Big



Executive Summary

- Customer Name: ConnectEDU
- Industry: Education
- Location: Boston, Massachusetts
- Number of Employees: 100+

Challenge:

- Reduce complexity of managing many different technologies
- Lower cost of maintaining large number of physical servers
- Deploy cloud platform to meet growing company needs

Solution:

- Cisco Unified Computing System enables server virtualization
- Cisco B200 Series Blade Servers reduce cost with integrated systems management
- Cisco Nexus 7000, 2000, and 1000V Series Switches form new network foundation

Results:

- Reduced monthly data center costs by 35 percent
- Accelerated application performance by five times
- Cut time spent provisioning new applications down from seven weeks to a few hours

ConnectEDU reduces cost and complexity of its data center by consolidating with Cisco Unified Computing System.

Challenge

Founded on the principle that everyone deserves access to a good education, ConnectEDU provides education and career management solutions to learners of all ages. Using real-time data and innovative technology platforms, the company helps students make informed decisions about how best to manage their education and launch their careers. Since its inception in 2002, ConnectEDU's network has grown to include 2500 high schools and 450 colleges.

To support its continued growth, the company needed a data center that allowed IT to increase capacity in the most cost-effective and agile way possible. However, when Chief Technology Officer Rick Blaisdell joined the company in 2009, he found that increasing capacity would require major renovations. "From Oracle, Java, .NET to Linux, we had many different technologies running in our data center, which definitely complicated the situation," he says. "We also had a massive amount of servers that were costing us a great deal of money to maintain."

Seeing virtualization as a means of reducing the cost and complexity of ConnectEDU's data center, Blaisdell turned to NaviSite, a managed cloud services provider. "I told them that we needed to take all of our physical hardware systems and just go virtual," says Blaisdell. "As a company, we couldn't continue with our status quo. It wasn't the best use of our money or time."

Solution

Working with NaviSite, Blaisdell and his team began looking for a data center platform that would best enable ConnectEDU's new cloud strategy. That solution was the Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS). "Because we were moving toward a web services model, and had many products communicating with each other, we needed a solution with low latency and high-speed switching," says Blaisdell. "We saw Cisco UCS as the leading-edge platform for our needs."

“Being able to manage everything in the same environment through Cisco UCS is a huge benefit for us...Unlike physical systems, which often involve multiple people managing them, our cloud environment gives us much more control.”

– Rick Blaisdell
Chief Technology Officer
ConnectEDU
www.connectedu.com



Today, ConnectEDU’s data center, which runs on NaviSite’s cloud platform, relies heavily on Cisco® UCS B200, B230, and B250 servers. These servers increase capacity for virtualization, while built-in pricing and support for VMware offer added convenience. “The combination of Cisco UCS and VMware has allowed us to get much higher server utilization and achieve consolidation,” says Blaisdell. Applications running on the UCS servers include a variety of Unix- and Windows-based systems, as well as the company’s internally-developed .NET applications.

Cisco Nexus® 7000, 2000, and 1000V Series Switches also play an important role in ConnectEDU’s cloud environment. With support for virtualization, these switches provide infrastructure scalability and transport flexibility. Says Blaisdell, “Integrating our storage and data networking through Cisco Unified Fabric has given us consistent performance and measurable capacity gains.”

In addition to better performance, ConnectEDU’s new virtualized data center also eases the administrative burden for Blaisdell and his team. “Being able to manage everything in the same environment through Cisco UCS is a huge benefit for us,” says Blaisdell. “And I think it also tightens security because it’s easier to maintain and monitor. Unlike physical systems, which often involve multiple people managing them, our cloud environment gives us much more control.”

Results

ConnectEDU has seen dramatic cost and time savings since moving its data center to Cisco UCS and the cloud. “First, we save money by eliminating the capital costs required in a physical rollout,” says Blaisdell. “We further reduce costs, because we’re only paying for utilization. As a result, we have reduced our monthly data center costs by 35 percent.”

Cisco UCS also helps enhance network and application performance. “Our new infrastructure is delivering five times more speed, and it allows my team to work faster,” says Blaisdell. “The server provisioning and physical rollouts that used to take us seven weeks to accomplish, now only take a few hours in a virtual environment.”

With fewer resources required to maintain its production environment, ConnectEDU can focus its IT efforts on more value-added tasks, such as building better products for its customers. “Thanks to Cisco UCS, we can act more nimbly as a company,” says Blaisdell. “It’s made my life a lot easier, and I’m able to sleep better at night knowing that everything is virtualized on a reliable, proven platform.”

Next Steps

ConnectEDU’s IT team continues to regularly expand the Cisco UCS solution with new Cisco UCS blades and chassis to grow its capabilities and support new products and services. Says Blaisdell, “Our goal is to develop the best products in the marketplace with the best pricing. Ultimately, we’re trying to help students find the career path that they’re looking for. And with these technologies, that’s where we can put all our energy.”

Product List

Data Center Solutions

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)
- Cisco UCS B200, B230, and B250 Servers

Routing and Switching

Cisco Nexus 7000, 2000, 1000V Series switches

Security

Cisco ASA 5500 Series Adaptive Security Appliance

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Computing, visit: www.cisco.com/go/ucs.

To find out more about Cisco Nexus Switches, visit: www.cisco.com/go/nexus.

To find out more about Cisco Security solutions, visit: www.cisco.com/go/security.

To find out more about ConnectEDU, visit: www.connectedu.com.

To find out more about Cloud Computing, visit: www.rickscloud.com.

This customer story is based on information provided by ConnectEDU and describes how that particular organization benefits from the deployment of Cisco products. Many factors may have contributed to the results and benefits described; Cisco does not guarantee comparable results elsewhere.

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