

Rebate Fulfillment Firm Cuts Costs, Boosts Performance



Executive Summary

Customer Name: Young America Corporation

Industry: Rebate Processing / Engagement Marketing

Location: Edina, MN

Website: www.young-america.com

Challenge:

- Increase data center capacity to handle growing volume of incoming business
- Improve availability to meet requirements for service-level agreements (SLAs)
- Enhance performance to boost employee productivity and customer satisfaction

Solution

- Cisco Unified Computing System integrates resources into single converged system
- Cisco Nexus switches minimize maintenance and management resource requirements
- Cisco UCS B-Series Blade Servers improve enterprise application availability and performance

Results:

- Boosted server virtualization rate from 20 to 97 percent
- Reduced power consumption by 94 percent
- Achieved a 10-to-1 compaction ratio

Young America deploys Cisco UCS to transform data center, expand capacity, and increase revenues.

Challenge

Young America Corp. was founded in 1972 to help three Minnesota businesses fulfill their customer rebate offers and other types of marketing promotions. Now, 40 years later, Young America is a global leader in online rebate processing. The company helps businesses around the world engage more closely with target markets throughout the entire lifecycle of acquiring, growing, and retaining loyal customers.

When Ted Bienapfl joined Young America, the physical infrastructure of the company's data center was already stressed beyond its capacity. "At any given time, we were in need of additional CPU capacity, memory, or network bandwidth," says Bienapfl, now the company's director of infrastructure, network services, and development. The stakes were high: Young America needed to increase all aspects of capacity to ensure profitability in the near-term.

The first priority was updating the network and unifying the data center architecture. Young America's existing technology needed to be replaced with much faster and more powerful systems. To achieve the performance that was vital to keeping Young America's operations running smoothly, Bienapfl knew he needed to find a solution that could be optimized to leverage virtualization to its full potential.

Solution

For Bienapfl, the solution was obvious: Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS™). In a previous position, he had been in the late stages of a proposed Cisco® UCS implementation when he moved to Young America. "So Cisco, and UCS, were top of mind when I arrived here and assessed the situation," he says.

“With this infrastructure upgrade, we basically opened up the floodgates to any and all new business submissions. And our customers are noticing, too. They’re noticing the fact that they’re getting their web pages quicker and they can throw more jobs at us. They’re especially noticing better performance and service across the board.”

– Ted Bienapfl
Director of Infrastructure,
Network Services, and
Development
Young America Corp.

Another key reason for choosing Cisco UCS: How easy it is to integrate with VMware. “Once we implemented the UCS platform, we were able to do the VMware migration very, very quickly. It took us about a month to get 90 percent of the current VMs migrated over, which is extremely fast,” Bienapfl says.

Bienapfl chose networking specialist and Cisco partner Eventis to help design and deploy the new data center architecture. “They were extremely knowledgeable on how to integrate the Cisco platform with technologies from VMware and other vendors, and were able to do everything we needed with ease,” he says.

As part of the new architecture, Young America upgraded its existing servers, HP four-core Opteron 885s with 32 gigabytes RAM, to a Cisco UCS-based data center architecture using Cisco Nexus® 7000 switches and Cisco MDS 9148 Multilayer Fabric Switches. For its VMware environment, the company implemented Cisco UCS B230 M2 Blade Servers.

On the software side, Young America is primarily a Microsoft shop. It supports more than 500 users on Exchange 2010, and runs Lync 2010, SQL Server 2008 R2, and Active Directory 2008. Having just successfully completed an upgrade to Office 2010, Young America is in the middle of deploying SharePoint Enterprise. To manage all this, the company depends on the Microsoft Service Center Manager platform and System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) 2007 R3.

All of this was achieved smoothly, says Bienapfl. “Like Cisco UCS, Microsoft plays very well in the virtualization space. So it was easy to make this all happen,” he says. “I have a lot of experience with other vendors, and they just can’t provide the whole virtualized hardware platform that Cisco does. So we were able to turn up our new systems with very little effort.”

Results

Due to the efficiency, reliability, and, most importantly, the ease of management of the Cisco UCS platform, Young America has already reaped significant benefits. In addition to reducing costs by hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, server, network, and storage utilization rates have improved significantly. “Our SAN was at 100 percent capacity. Now it’s less than 50 percent utilized,” says Bienapfl. And, with CPU utilization in the 10 percent range and memory at just 40 percent, “we eventually expect to run 65 to 70 virtual machines per VMware host.”

Power usage has also gone down a full 94 percent. “When I joined Young America, we were operating 41 racks and related gear nonstop. The room was hot, and we were running out of power,” says Bienapfl. With UCS, he’s been able to optimize computing resources and achieve a 10-to-1 compaction ratio. “We’ll soon be running our entire operations on just five racks,” he says. “We’re already starting to turn off cooling units and downsize UPS systems.”

According to Bienapfl, Young America’s move toward virtualization is nearly finished. Previously, the company had a 20-percent virtualization rate. Today, it has achieved 97 percent virtualization. Performance has also increased by orders of magnitude. Web requests that formerly took 30 milliseconds to process are now completed in less than one millisecond. “We run a lot of page views, so it’s easy to see how quickly this adds up,” he says.

Product List

Data Center Solutions

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)
 - Cisco UCS 6120 Fabric Interconnects
 - Cisco UCS B200 and B230 M2 Blade Servers
 - Cisco UCS 5108 Blade Server Chassis
- Cisco Nexus 7000 Series Switches
- Cisco MDS 9148 Multilayer Fabric Switch

Applications

- Microsoft Windows Server 2008 R2
- Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010
- Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2
- Microsoft System Center Suite (Configuration Manager, Service Center Manager, Operations Manager)
- Microsoft Lync 2010

Next Steps

Going forward, Young America is dealing with a new, and more welcome, kind of challenge: A rush of new business. "With this infrastructure upgrade, we basically opened up the floodgates to any and all new business submissions," says Bienapfl. "And our customers are noticing, too. They're noticing the fact that they're getting their web pages quicker, and they can throw more jobs at us. They're especially noticing better performance and service across the board."

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Data Centers, visit: www.cisco.com/go/unifieddatacenter.

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 MDS solutions, visit: www.cisco.com/go/mds.

This customer story is based on information provided by Young America Corporation 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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