Technology Network Expands Offerings for Schools and Governments

NEOnet upgraded its physical facility and data center to make room for new technology and allow for continued growth.

Executive Summary

NEOnet

- **Industry:** Education and State and Local Government
- **Location:** Ohio
- **Number of Students Represented:** Approximately 110,000

CHALLENGE

- Support expanding operations
- Expand into new market: state and local government
- Provide new services to customers, including virtual desktop and wireless

SOLUTION

- Upgraded physical infrastructure, including expansion of data center space
- Deployed new data center technology

RESULTS

- Increased scalability and flexibility
- Reduced power and cooling costs
- Expanded shared service options for customers

Challenge

The Northeast Ohio Network for Educational Technology (NEOnet) is one of 22 designated information technology centers (ITC) in the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN), providing data management and computer services for members and affiliated school districts. NEOnet proudly serves 40 educational entities in Cuyahoga, Lake, Medina, Portage, and Summit counties, which include 27 school districts, 2 county offices, 3 career centers, 3 digital academies, 3 parochial schools, and 2 community schools. The council represents about 110,000 students. Additionally, NEOnet just signed on its first city government participant, Cuyahoga Falls City.

Formed in 1995, NEOnet provides a wide array of data management and computer services such as business application software and voice over IP (VoIP) that members utilize in a shared services model. This approach allows members to collaborate and share resources on key technologies instead of having to implement and support the same functionality individually. The high rate of adoption of NEOnet services has resulted in one of the lowest service fees in the entire state.

"Our management council recognized that our servers were extremely outdated, and we did not have adequate training facilities for end users. Additionally, we were lacking physical space for our expanding data center," says Matt Gdovin, executive director of NEOnet. "Because of this, we embarked on building a state-of-the-art data center to deliver services through a shared services model and enable us to expand the service offerings to other education entities and to serve new customers, such as local governments."

Solution

The first step before deploying any technology was for NEOnet to determine the new services that its customers need. "Based on a customer assessment, we discovered an interest in wireless and desktop virtualization and realized that if we did not upgrade and expand our data center, we would not be able to provide those services. We also believed that no one could provide these services and opportunities as cost-efficiently and as well as we could at NEOnet," says Gdovin.

To run an efficient data center today, the facility must be considered as a whole; it is more than just a server operations center. "In planning our new data center, we thought about more than what we need today. We were really focused on what we will need tomorrow. Because of that, we built a backup power source and provided room for expansion in the data center, as well as in-row cooling with Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) that is highly scalable. We built the most energy-efficient and green data center that we could," says Gdovin.

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Matt Gdovin
Executive Director, NEOnet

As a unified data center solution, Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS™) integrates industry-standard x86 blade servers, access and storage networking, virtualization, and management into a single system, eliminating redundant devices and layers of management complexity. A single management interface controls multiple chassis and thousands of virtual machines, reducing the complexity of highly-virtualized environments and thus increasing agility, scalability, and employee productivity. The efficient design of Cisco® UCS also accelerates and simplifies application deployment with greater reliability and security. Although it depends on the application, it used to take our technical team an average of five days to launch a new application or server; because of UCS virtualization, it now only takes hours. UCS virtualization is already running on UCS, so it is ready to go.

NEOnet recognized that, without a standardized data center that can scale and grow with an organization, it could not offer value-add services. The improved data center now enables NEOnet to offer services to school districts and local governments throughout Ohio, while a new facility lets customers do product testing and training, which is an end-to-end solution.

Results

The new solution center and data center have created a number of changes at NEOnet. In particular, the energy-efficient data center has saved NEOnet money on power and cooling. Additionally, the new solution center and data center have increased the productivity of the NEOnet staff. The ability to install, stage, and train on new service offerings saves staff time while reducing project completion timelines.

"The concept of shared services isn't new to us; it is just something we wanted to expand. We wanted to continue delivering cost-effective services in a scalable way. With today's budgetary issues, shared and managed services provide cost savings for agencies and schools that is critical," says Gdovin. With Cisco UCS, NEOnet is more prepared than ever to expand its service offerings to include virtual desktop, support for multiple devices, and wireless technology.

NEOnet's shared services model has become more effective and efficient as a result of its new data center technology. "Shared and/or managed services provide agencies and schools with offerings they could not otherwise afford and may not have known existed," says Gdovin. "The collaboration of NEOnet is our value-add. We enable public agencies and schools to pool their purchasing power to obtain the type of services used by much larger organizations."

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Product List

DATA CENTER

- Cisco UCS Blade Chassis and B Series

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Find out more about the Cisco Unified Data Center platform at http://www.cisco.com/go/datacenter or Cisco UCS servers at http://www.cisco.com/go/UCS.

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