

Columbia Sportswear

Premium outdoor apparel manufacturer drives global expansion with EMC and Cisco



ESSENTIALS

Industry

Outdoor apparel and accessories

Company Size

Approximately 4,200 employees

Business Challenges

- Rapid business expansion
- Legacy infrastructure difficult to manage and scale

Solutions

- EMC VMAX enterprise storage
- EMC Isilon scale-out storage
- VCE Vblock Systems
- EMC RecoverPoint
- EMC Data Domain
- EMC Ionix
- Cisco UCS
- Cisco Nexus and MDS
- Cisco WAAS
- VMware vSphere
- VMware vCenter SRM
- SAP ERP, Cisco Unified Communications Manager, Microsoft SQL Server, Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SharePoint, BizTalk

CUSTOMER PROFILE

OVERVIEW

Columbia Sportswear Company is an industry leader in the design, manufacture, and distribution of innovative outdoor apparel, footwear, accessories, and equipment. Founded in 1938, Columbia Sportswear serves a global market with 3,200 employees and offices in 45 countries.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

Columbia Sportswear is growing rapidly as the company opened 25 new stores in the last three years and expanded into Asia. With business projected to nearly triple from \$1.7 billion to \$5 billion in revenue in the coming years, the company's previous infrastructure of aging NetApp, HP, and IBM systems was becoming more difficult to manage and slow to respond to the changing needs of the business.

After evaluating solutions from EMC, Cisco, NetApp, IBM, HP, and Hitachi, Columbia selected solutions from EMC and Cisco to unify its IT infrastructure.

Michael Leeper, Columbia's director, global technology, remarks, "We consider EMC and Cisco to be best of the best when it comes to high-performing, state-of-the-art platforms. We totally trust and believe in this combination. And the great partnership between EMC and Cisco, and the strong relationship with us, also helped sealed the deal."

SOLUTIONS

To address business requirements for increased agility and efficiency, Columbia Sportswear has standardized on EMC and Cisco infrastructure systems. Columbia replaced NetApp, IBM, and HP storage with EMC® VMAX® enterprise storage comprising three tiers of Flash, Fibre Channel, and SATA drives, as well as EMC FAST™ VP (Fully Automated Storage Tiering for Virtual Pools) to optimize performance and utilization.

Columbia also replaced its HP servers with Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) servers and deployed Cisco MDS director-class SAN and Nexus data center switches, along with Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) software for network optimization and application acceleration. EMC sells and services Cisco MDS SAN products under the EMC Connectrix® brand.

Columbia's enterprise applications, including Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SQL Server, Microsoft SharePoint, BizTalk, and Cisco Unified Communications Manager, run on the EMC and Cisco infrastructure.

To drive its business-critical SAP enterprise resource planning (ERP) environment, Columbia replaced IBM systems with VCE Vblock® Systems, which incorporate Cisco UCS servers, Cisco MDS networking, EMC VMAX enterprise storage, EMC Ionix® Unified Infrastructure Management software, and VMware® vSphere™ virtualization technology.

Results

- Reduced project lead times from six weeks to two days
- Cut the number of physical servers in half
- Realized hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings
- Achieved RPO of 15 minutes and RTO of eight hours

With tight integration across VMware, EMC, Cisco, and Vblock system technologies, Columbia rapidly evolved from a 30 percent to a 98 percent virtualized infrastructure.

In addition, Columbia deployed EMC Isilon® X-Series scale-out storage for supporting home directories, including product designs, merchandise catalogues, Microsoft Word documents, and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets—as well as Exchange email archives. Columbia also deployed Isilon software, including EMC Isilon InsightIQ® for accurate statistical monitoring and insight into the Isilon infrastructure.

For disaster recovery (DR), Columbia uses EMC RecoverPoint™ and VMware vCenter Site Recovery Manager (SRM) to replicate its VMAX storage and virtualized applications between its production data center and remote site 1,200 miles away. Isilon storage is protected using EMC Isilon SyncIQ® software, which provides asynchronous data replication between primary and remote clusters.

Columbia also has standardized on EMC Data Domain® deduplication storage systems to back up its entire infrastructure.

ENABLING FUNDAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

Today, Columbia has a fully functional, mature private cloud built on EMC, Cisco, and VMware solutions. This powerful combination of technologies is enabling a fundamental IT and business transformation.

Leeper explains, "EMC and Cisco work better together than any other combination of equipment on the market. The kicker is that EMC and Cisco have certified each other's products. That makes our job a lot easier because we don't have to spend time working through compatibility issues. Instead, we can put our focus on better serving the needs of the business."

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Michael Leeper
Director of Global Technology at Columbia Sportswear

REDEFINED PROJECT TIMELINES

The cloud's agility is changing the way IT relates to Columbia's business users. In the past, business projects required extensive lead time for IT to procure hardware and configure application environments. Now, IT is helping its internal clients to redefine their project timelines.

"We're working with clients to revamp the project intake process, explaining that they no longer have to allow weeks or months for us to provide resources," says Leeper.

"Now we can deploy a new environment within a couple of days—sometimes in as little as an hour."

This new level of responsiveness still surprises some within the company. For example, when Columbia's finance team purchased a new SAP module, IT was given six weeks to get the environment ready for the consultant to implement the module. IT was actually ready in less than one-tenth the time—weeks before the consultant was ready to begin deployment.

"With our Vblock technologies, we delivered a new SAP application environment in two days and used half the resources the finance department had planned on," reports Leeper. "We're now in the mode of responding to requests like that as fast as the business demands. That's how IT returns value to the company."

SIMPLICITY ENABLES GROWTH

One of the many ways that Cisco and EMC are driving Columbia's transformation is by simplifying IT. Leeper explains that with extensive virtualization, Columbia doesn't need to manage hardware resources as in traditional physical infrastructures.

"A key factor in choosing Cisco UCS over competing solutions was its simplicity," he notes. "UCS makes our life easier because we don't spend time trying to understand all kinds of management layers. You just plug it in and it works. With Columbia moving as fast as it is, being able to grow and adapt quickly thanks to the simplicity of the UCS and VMAX architectures is extremely valuable."

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HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN SAVINGS

Cisco UCS servers also deliver higher efficiency, enabling Columbia to reduce its physical servers from 160 to 80, while supporting 2,200 virtual machines and growing.

"We use almost half the number of physical servers in our data centers with Cisco as we did with HP," affirms Leeper. "And we've shrunk our footprint from 72 rack units down to about eight rack units in our stores."

He points out that higher efficiency and virtualization translate to lower cost. "Our virtualized UCS infrastructure is easily 30 to 40 percent less expensive to operate than a physical environment."

The efficiency of the latest VMAX 40K with FAST VP also enables Columbia to more efficiently handle performance and capacity requirements. For example, while Flash drives account for just 10 percent of total capacity, they provide the IOPS needed to support the growing business. As a result, Columbia can use lower-cost, higher-capacity drives for the bulk of its storage requirements, reducing costs.

Leeper credits VMAX and FAST VP with improving drive utilization by 40 percent, as well as reducing Columbia's physical IT footprint by 25 percent. All of this is leading to dramatic cost savings.

"By using storage more efficiently, we expect hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings from VMAX 40K over the life of the system," reports Leeper.

MORE TIME FOR INNOVATION

EMC and Cisco are also delivering high levels of performance for Columbia.

"Cisco technologies provide out-of-the-box high performance," states Leeper. "And EMC storage arrays are more advanced and better performing than any other storage available to us today."

In fact, with VMAX and FAST VP, Leeper and his team hardly think about performance any more. "FAST VP has changed our world," he says. "We no longer worry about what type of I/O the business units demand. All we do is ask how much storage they need and FAST VP is smart and nimble enough to figure out the rest. So we spend much less time tuning and crafting the environment."

Because of the stability of VMAX, little time is spent troubleshooting and fixing problems either, which leaves much more time for innovation.

"VMAX platforms are truly rock solid," states Leeper. "We just do not have outages. That means we can spend more time looking at future technologies and coming up with the next great thing to help the business."

INCREASED SCALABILITY FOR GROWING USER FILES

EMC Isilon played a key role in Columbia's transformation by providing a highly scalable solution for supporting home directories. Isilon supports more than 2,000 users across the company and handles data volumes growing at a rate of 90 to 95 percent per year.

"Isilon is one of the most visible technologies our users deal with every day," observes Leeper. "It provides the high-performance and reliability users want to access their documents, email, and phone messages. Isilon provides the standardized document and user directory storage we want. And with SyncIQ, Isilon offers the replication and management technology we need to ensure security and stability and protect vital data."

"The great thing about working with EMC and Cisco is they share a common vision. So I know they will be on the same path to help us transform our IT infrastructure as the requirements of the business change."

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BULLETPROOF DISASTER RECOVERY

With RecoverPoint and vCenter SRM, Columbia has greatly improved business continuity. For tier-one applications, the company easily meets its recovery point objective (RPO) of 15 minutes and recovery time objective (RTO) of eight hours. In fact, Leeper says they typically run much tighter.

"On most days, the replication is lagging by just four seconds, so we are well below the 15-minute RPO for tier one," he notes. "And we can recover the entire data center in less than eight hours. With tape, recovery would have taken 45 days—if we could have recovered at all."

Leeper adds, "Our DR strategy is really bulletproof. It's almost fully automated, so my team goes to sleep at night knowing that if something happens, the systems will take care of themselves."

COMMON VISION FOR THE FUTURE

As Columbia Sportswear continues to expand, Leeper is confident that Cisco and EMC will meet the company's growing business needs.

"We're continuing to invest in newer-generation Cisco blades," he advises. "And we plan to deploy EMC VPLEX® Geo to enable long-distance movement of workloads across our data centers. That will give us the ultimate in efficient resource utilization."

"The great thing about working with EMC and Cisco is they share a common vision," he concludes. "So I know they will be on the same path to help us transform our IT infrastructure as the requirements of the business change."

CONTACT US

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