

Auction House Creates Flexible, Dynamic Data Center



Executive Summary

Customer Name: Heritage Auctions

Industry: Specialty Retail

Location: Dallas, Texas

Number of Employees: 400

Challenge:

- Replace aging storage area network equipment
- Select industry-leading technology that integrates well with existing environment
- Enable small IT team to manage global business operations

Solution:

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) provides flexible server platform
- Cisco MDS 9000 Series Multilayer Switches offer easy configuration and scalability
- Cisco UCS integrates smoothly with EMC storage and VMware

Results:

- Consolidated data center from eight to two and a half racks
- Enabled IT team to respond to business needs more effectively
- Reduced time to provision new server space from almost a week to a few hours

Heritage Auctions quickly consolidates environment and gains management agility with Cisco Unified Computing System.

Challenge

Founded in 1976, Heritage Auctions (HA) is the largest collectibles auctioneer and the third largest auction house in the world. The company offers a wide range of rare coins and currency, fine art, memorabilia, natural history specimens, and more. In addition to live auctions, HA hosts auctions on its website HA.com, a thriving community that serves more than 650,000 collectors worldwide.

HA depends on its data center to keep its auctions running smoothly and help ensure its collectors are satisfied. Faced with aging storage equipment, Brian Carpenter, the company's Director of Information Technology, decided to reevaluate solutions across the environment. "What it really came down to was that we had a storage area network [SAN] that was technically outdated and physically past its prime. It was more than five years old, and you just naturally need to replace things at a certain age," he says.

After evaluating several storage vendors, the company's IT solutions partner, Dallas, Texas-based INX, urged Carpenter to change the scope of the upgrade project. "We were about to purchase our new equipment when INX asked us why we weren't considering Cisco Unified Computing System," Carpenter says. "I trust INX completely, so I knew it was time to take a step back and reevaluate our options."

Solution

Given that HA has a range of other Cisco solutions, INX's recommendation to consider the Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS™) made perfect sense. "We use Cisco solutions from end to end. Telephony, switches, if it's in our environment, it's probably a Cisco product," he says. "We have a deep relationship with Cisco, and I have the utmost confidence in their products, so going with UCS was a no-brainer."

“In less than 48 hours, we installed three UCS blade enclosures and fully transitioned our servers to the new environment. It really is mind-boggling the amount of space we saved and how quickly we got everything up and running.”

- **Brian Carpenter**
Director of Information
Technology
Heritage Auctions



Today, the HA data center houses both Cisco® UCS B-Series Blade Servers and C-Series Rack-Mount Servers. The updated environment now depends on Cisco MDS 9000 Series Multilayer Switches and EMC hardware to create a highly available storage network. HA also leverages the Cisco Catalyst 6504-E Chassis and the Cisco Application Control Engine (ACE) for load balancing their environment.

With its new data center solutions that work in concert with its existing VMware technology, HA is well on its way to reaching Carpenter’s goal of virtualizing 98 percent of the company’s environment. “We’re about 70 percent virtualized already, and the combination of Cisco UCS, EMC, and VMware is much easier to manage than our previous infrastructure,” he says. “As we optimize our systems, the environment is just going to start flying.”

VMware on Cisco UCS supports HA’s critical business applications, including Microsoft SQL Servers and SharePoint environment. “In the short term, we’re going to virtualize Microsoft Exchange 2010. Our long-term goal is to put the website, the phone system, and basically every system we can on UCS,” says Carpenter. “It’s an ideal solution that has the flexibility to work across our environment.”

Results

With Cisco UCS, HA has been able to consolidate its data center significantly in a very short amount of time. “Prior to virtualization on UCS, our environment had somewhere around 180 physical servers. Now, what used to take up eight to ten racks worth of data center space fits in two and a half racks,” Carpenter says. “In less than 48 hours, we installed three UCS blade enclosures and fully transitioned our servers to the new environment. It really is mind-boggling the amount of space we saved and how quickly we got everything up and running.” He also notes improved Microsoft SQL performance, thanks to a VMware infrastructure running on Cisco UCS and EMC Symmetrix VMAXe with FAST VP.

According to Carpenter, Cisco UCS has also made his small, four-person team more agile, giving them the ability to respond to last-minute requests and meet the company’s needs. “Before UCS, it would have taken us a week or so to provision more server space. Now we have much more flexibility, so it takes us half a day. Our data center environment is much more dynamic,” he says.

Finally, Cisco UCS allows Carpenter and his team to stop worrying about day-to-day resource management and focus on how to use its resources most effectively. “Instead of having to use lots of different systems, we’re set with Cisco UCS, EMC, and VMware,” he says. “We can concentrate on innovating in our environment, not just managing it.”

Product List

Data Center Solutions

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)
 - Cisco UCS B230 Blade Servers
 - Cisco UCS C210 M2 General-Purpose Rack-Mount Servers

Routing and Switching

- Cisco MDS 9148 and 9513 Multilayer Switches
- Cisco Catalyst 6504-E Switch

Application Networking

- Cisco Application Control Engine (ACE) Module

Applications

- Microsoft: Exchange, SharePoint, SQL Server
- VMware

Storage Solutions

- EMC Symmetrix VMAXe with FAST VP

Next Steps

Looking ahead, Carpenter and his team will continue to enhance their environment and maximize its potential. "We've just scratched the surface of what UCS can do for us when combined with our EMC storage and VMware technology," says Carpenter. "We're excited to move our virtualization efforts forward and see what Cisco can help us do next."

For More Information

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

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

To learn more about Cisco Catalyst Switches, visit: www.cisco.com/go/catalyst.

This customer story is based on information provided by Heritage Auctions 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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