Business challenge

Haines is in an exciting period of change: growing fast and diversifying its product line. To support its evolving business, the company needed more agile information systems.

Transformation

Laying the foundations for a more dynamic organization, Haines teamed up with IBM Premier Business Partner VSS to deploy VersaStack, a converged infrastructure solution from IBM and Cisco.

Chad Parson
Information Technology Manager
at Haines

Business benefits

99%

of IT issues now resolved internally, boosting productivity

30%

reduction in time previously spent on IT management

Slashes

time needed to add future workloads with automated scaling and management

JJ Haines and Company, LLC

Laying the groundwork for a dynamic, agile organization that is ready for anything

Founded in 1874 as a general store in Upperville, Virginia, by John James Haines, JJ Haines and Company, LLC (Haines) is the largest floor-covering distribution company in the United States of America, with operations across the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Southeast. Haines offers a highly diverse portfolio of floor-covering products, including the world's leading brands, and operates one of the most technologically advanced logistics and distribution companies in the country.

"With VersaStack, we can adapt faster than ever, enabling us to act sooner on opportunities".

—Chad Parson, Information Technology Manager, Haines

VersaStack™ Solution
by Cisco and IBM

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Exploring new frontiers

For Haines, the last few years have brought opportunities and growth. Rather than shying away from change, the company has begun looking into diversification of its product line.

Chad Parson, Information Technology Manager at Haines, says: "Two years ago we made an acquisition that more than doubled the number of our locations and employees. Now we are starting to think about what else we can offer alongside flooring.

"All this leads to extra demands on IT; and we must rise to the occasion, or risk curtailing company growth. The challenge was how we could prepare for an unknown future, ensuring that we were ready to expand if needed, without overinvesting in capacity."

As a supply chain specialist, Haines operates warehouses 24/7, so employees need rapid and reliable access to critical IT systems. When the time for an infrastructure refresh came around, the company saw an opportunity for improvement.

"We have a relatively lean IT team, so straightforward management is a key priority," says Chad Parson. "The complexity of our previous infrastructure meant that it was difficult to identify and resolve issues. We began looking for a simpler, more powerful solution that could give us the control and flexibility we needed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future."

Making a measured decision

To bring new agility and simplicity to Haines' operations, the company selected VersaStack, an integrated solution that includes IBM storage and Cisco server, networking and management components. In making the decision, Haines looked to long-time partner VSS for guidance.

Chad Parson explains: "Alongside VSS, we spent about six months looking at the different options open to us, before deciding that VersaStack was the right choice because it scored highly on performance and ease of management, and is built for virtualization.

"Another critical factor in our decision was that VersaStack could integrate seamlessly into our existing IBM storage area network. Adopting an IBM SAN with built-in IBM® Spectrum Protect™ Snapshot had slashed our backup times from four hours to just five minutes, a benefit we did not want to lose."

Embracing a new approach

With help from VSS, Haines achieved a rapid migration of systems, including email and sales dashboards, over to the new environment. Chad Parson recalls: "The implementation went even smoother than we expected. VSS set up the new environment side-by-side with our existing one, enabling a painless cutover."

Haines engaged VSS to conduct a proof-of-concept exercise to investigate the possibility of offering virtual desktops using its new solution. The results were impressive, and the company is now in the testing phase and will soon roll out the capability to warehouse workers.

"In our warehouse, employees need access to email and a few other systems but not the more heavy-lifting programs," says Chad Parson. "We realized that giving these employees virtual desktops rather than full clients would enable us to optimize use of resources, and cut down on our management requirements. Offering VDI was too complicated on our old infrastructure, but with VersaStack we can not only provide VDI, but also manage the environment ourselves."

Taking command

Thanks to the deployment of VersaStack, Haines has gained greater control over IT. Specifically, the company can now resolve IT issues, and modify its infrastructure and provision resources independently, enabling greater agility.

"Previously, we needed help from VSS to make changes to our infrastructure," comments Chad Parson. "The intuitive management capabilities offered by Cisco UCS Director give us unprecedented control, especially when it comes to troubleshooting our environment.

"We can now resolve more than 99 percent of IT issues that arise internally, compared to just 40 percent before. For example, we can now independently update firmware in about an hour, whereas previously we needed an external consultant to help us complete the process over around 35 hours.

And, if we do have a problem we cannot solve ourselves, choosing VersaStack means we have a single point of contact for support.

"Overall, we have saved about 30 percent on the time previously spent resolving IT issues, minimizing the impact of any problems on operations. With VersaStack, we can adapt faster than ever, enabling us to act sooner on opportunities."

With a simpler, more compact infrastructure solution in place, Haines has easy scalability options at hand, clearing the path to future growth.

Chad Parson concludes: "Moving to VersaStack, we reduced the equipment in our rack from 75 percent full to around a third, and yet we have gained all these additional capabilities. If we need to scale up, it is so easy that we could probably install the additional capacity ourselves, something we never would have said before. Deploying VersaStack, we have gained a platform for the future, which will help us ensure we are ready for whatever comes our way."

Solution components

- VersaStack by IBM and Cisco
  - Cisco B-Series Blade Servers
  - Cisco Nexus 9000
  - Cisco UCS Director
  - Cisco Unified Computing System
  - IBM® Storwize® V5000

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Take the next step

To learn more about how IBM and Cisco are working together to develop innovative storage and networking solutions for the data center, contact your IBM or Cisco representative or Business Partner, or visit the following websites: **ibm.com**/versastack or www.cisco.com/go/versastack

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