



NetApp®

Success Story

ActionNet Sets the Stage for a Versatile FlexPod Datacenter Solution with Microsoft Private Cloud



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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry

Service Provider

The Challenge

Accommodate growing workloads, quickly roll out solutions, and seamlessly support new business.

The Solution

Build a powerful, flexible IT foundation with Microsoft® Hyper-V® and VMware® vSphere® on the FlexPod® Datacenter platform to better facilitate application solution offerings and unimpeded growth.

Benefits

- Stand up complex customer environments in weeks versus months
- Accommodate more projects on more platforms inside and outside the company
- Reduce development time for a VDI environment from two weeks to less than two days

Customer Profile

Known for its ability to successfully address complex challenges with innovative, cost-effective, and results-driven IT solutions and services, ActionNet, Inc., has earned a reputation as a trusted advisor among large government agencies and a growing number of commercial and healthcare clients. Its quality offerings are backed by proven methodologies supported by seasoned professionals with deep expertise in cloud infrastructure, security, software engineering, program management, and IT business governance.

The Challenge

Speeding solutions to customers

As a Microsoft Gold Partner, ActionNet has a significant amount of business that is related to supporting its customers' installed base of Microsoft applications, such as Exchange Server, SQL Server®, and SharePoint® Server, as well as the latest version of Windows Server® Hyper-V. With the rapid succession of Microsoft product releases over the last few years, helping customers make the most of their Microsoft software investments by providing strategic advice on upgrade timing and approach has become increasingly important.

To enable this expertise, ActionNet developers must have ready access to IT resources to quickly spin up new test environments while maintaining earlier versions to compare and contrast the old to new. Another important capability for the company is the flexibility to support different technologies and platforms, such as leveraging VMware View™ to support both internal and external customers' virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) initiatives.

Development and support for ActionNet's diverse and growing range of offerings, combined with an expanding customer base and a subsequent increase in staff, were straining the limits of the company's disparate server and direct-attached storage (DAS) environment. Complex and costly to manage and scale, the environment was becoming a limiting factor in ActionNet's ability to expand in new directions. To increase the efficiency and flexibility of its operations, ActionNet sought a new data center solution capable of supporting current levels of growth while providing a strong foundation to launch a new private cloud environment. NetApp channel partner CDW was engaged to help ActionNet research and deploy the best solution for its needs.

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Nathaniel Avery

Senior Solutions Architect, ActioNet, Inc.

The Solution

Right-sized for a growing company

ActioNet decided to standardize on the FlexPod converged infrastructure platform from NetApp and Cisco for multiple reasons. FlexPod offered an enterprise-class server, storage, and networking environment as a pre-designed, prevalidated solution proven to reduce deployment risks and time.

With customers relying on ActioNet’s solutions and services to run essential parts of their businesses, proof-of-concept confidence was a critical factor in ActioNet’s decision process. FlexPod provided an easier, more cost-effective, and less disruptive way to manage and scale the company’s IT infrastructure compared with its previous DAS environment. In addition, the FlexPod platform supported seamless integration with Microsoft and VMware technologies—a key asset that would enable ActioNet to support a broad range of internal and customer solutions now and in the future.

“Some of the solutions we considered were too small, without much capability; others were too big and complex to manage,” says Nathaniel Avery, senior solutions architect at ActioNet, Inc. “FlexPod is the perfect solution. It’s just the right size with all the right features—and flexible enough to grow and support our new Microsoft Private Cloud.”

Advanced technology in a compact footprint

Deployed with support from CDW in just a few weeks, ActioNet’s new FlexPod solution takes up half the physical data center space of the previous DAS infrastructure yet provides new levels of power, capacity, and agility to propel the business forward without constraint. It includes a NetApp FAS2240HA storage system with 30 terabytes of SAS running the NetApp® unified storage operating system, the Data ONTAP® architecture; Cisco® Unified Computing System™ (UCS®) B200 M3 blade servers; and Cisco Nexus® 5000 Series switches. A secondary NetApp FAS2240HA, coupled with NetApp SnapMirror® software, supports robust disaster recovery.

“CDW helped us pick the best solution, worked with NetApp and Cisco to size it, and then coordinated the deployment,” says Avery. “It was such a collaborative team that it was hard to know who was working for whom; we just knew at the end of the day everything would be ready to go. That was a big win for us.”

An agile platform

Approximately 85% of ActioNet’s environment has been virtualized, with FlexPod support for both Microsoft Windows Server Hyper-V and VMware

vSphere. “Knowing that FlexPod supports everything from compute to networking to storage and virtualization is a great advantage,” says Avery. “It enables us to leverage different technologies where they will work best. We use Windows Server Hyper-V to support day-to-day applications such as our Microsoft SharePoint farms and SQL Servers. We’re also able to take advantage of best-of-breed solutions like VMware View for VDI.”

Optimized management

Working in concert with one another, NetApp, Cisco, Microsoft, and VMware management tools give ActioNet a cohesive approach to IT administration. The ability to simplify and automate many functions—from optimizing performance and utilization to application provisioning, data protection, and reporting—helps ActioNet easily and effectively manage its IT infrastructure and support its growing business with a small IT staff.

“We recently had a situation where one of our SQL Servers needed additional storage capacity, and by utilizing NetApp SnapManager for SQL Server software we were able to increase it in about five minutes, with no downtime,” explains Avery. “This type of ease of maintenance and enhanced efficiency gives us more time to carefully plan our

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long-term automation strategy focused on our customers' needs. The results greatly benefit our customers and improve our business.”

Business Benefits

Saying “yes” to customers

Systems integration work and building web-developed applications are major sources of business for ActioNet. The ability to deliver on-demand server and storage resources for test and development has given the company a means to better and more rapidly serve its customers. “FlexPod technology has allowed us to be adaptive to our clients' changing needs and requirements,” says Jeffrey Abish, ActioNet's EVP and CTO.

“For instance, FlexPod recently helped ActioNet respond to a new customer requirement to upgrade from SharePoint 2010 to 2013 by easily standing up a new clustered environment and applying security controls for SharePoint 2013,” says Avery. “FlexPod gives us breathing room to quickly create test and development environments and show results to customers faster. Instead of months, we can stand up complex environments in days.”

The inherent platform agility of FlexPod has also helped ActioNet secure business with two large government agencies and deploy a VDI infrastructure with

more than 22,000 users to date. In addition, FlexPod has proved to be a VDI facilitator for an in-house VMware View 5.0 pilot program. The recent deployment of NetApp OnCommand® Balance software is helping ActioNet further simplify VDI management as well as shorten development of a VDI environment from two weeks to less than two hours.

The ActioNet IT team also leveraged FlexPod to quickly roll out Microsoft Lync 2013 to support an internal company-wide meeting earlier this year. In the old DAS environment this would have required a time-consuming process of sizing solutions and pulling together the necessary infrastructure to support the application. With FlexPod, all of the resources were ready and waiting. It was simply a matter of carving out the virtual machines to prepare the environment.

“It took us a little over two weeks to get Lync up and running, in time for several hundred people throughout the United States to successfully connect over it,” says Avery. “Everything went off without a hitch, including the real-time video. With FlexPod supporting our activities we can say yes to more projects on more platforms and get them out to customers faster.”

FlexPod: a “shortcut” to Microsoft Private Cloud

Using FlexPod as its launching pad, ActioNet is currently nearing the end of a three-month process that will culminate in the deployment of its new Microsoft Private Cloud. Unlike other options that can't scale beyond a certain point, the FlexPod platform enables ActioNet to quickly transition to and grow its private cloud—all while retaining the advantages of a unified and cohesive server, storage, and networking infrastructure. “We saw FlexPod as a rapid entry to the cloud in that we could stand up quickly and with minimal impact to our IT resources,” says Abish.

Freed from the inflexible hardware and application silos of the past, ActioNet is already benefitting from easily provisioned and shared resources for current workloads. It will soon take FlexPod capabilities even further within its Microsoft Private Cloud. With FlexPod integration support for both Microsoft System Center and VMware vCloud® Suite, ActioNet will be able to facilitate “single-pane-of-glass” management for the entire infrastructure. “Despite growth in the number of employees, applications, and customers, the size of our IT department staff should stay about the same,” says Abish.

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New avenues of opportunity

With FlexPod supporting the capabilities of Microsoft Private Cloud, ActioNet hopes to eventually provide a self-service portal to quickly supply developers with the tools and resources to take customer satisfaction levels even higher. “It’s a win for us any time we’re better able to help our customers and our business,” says Abish.

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SOLUTION COMPONENTS

FlexPod Solution

FlexPod data center with Microsoft Private Cloud

FlexPod Components

Two NetApp FAS2240HA storage systems
Cisco UCS, B200 M Series blade servers
Cisco Nexus 5548 switches
Cisco UCS 6248UP Fabric Interconnect

Virtualization Components

Microsoft Windows Server 2012 with Hyper-V Version 3
VMware vSphere 5

NetApp Software

NetApp Data ONTAP 8
NetApp OnCommand Management Software including: OnCommand Balance, SnapDrive® for Windows,

NetApp SnapManager® for Microsoft Hyper-V, NetApp SnapManager for Microsoft SQL Server, and NetApp Virtual Storage Console for VMware vSphere

NetApp Snapshot™ and SnapRestore® technologies
NetApp SnapMirror

Third-Party Products

Applications: Microsoft Exchange Server 2010; Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010, 2013; Microsoft Dynamics CRM 2011; Microsoft Lync 2013; Cisco UCS Manager 2.1, and VMware View

Database: Microsoft SQL Server 2012
Server Platform: Microsoft Windows Server 2012, Linux® Centaurus

Partner

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