

Top Fitness Publisher Optimizes Data Center, Improves Performance



Executive Summary

Customer Name: Human Kinetics

Industry: Publishing

Location: Champaign, Illinois

Number of Employees: 320

Challenge:

- Improve storage scalability to meet present and future growth demands
- Downsize data center while optimizing manageability and performance
- Migrate to blade solution to increase data center capacity

Solution:

- Cisco Unified Computing System optimizes capacity and enables virtualization
- Cisco architecture integrates with VMware for cohesive management of virtualized machines
- Cisco UCS-B Series Blade Servers enhance data center performance

Results:

- Saved more than 40 percent overall, with reduced hardware and management costs
- Increased memory capacity and performance
- Reduced server requirements by 50 percent by migrating to blade solution

Human Kinetics deploys Cisco solutions for improved performance to meet growing digital content delivery demands.

Challenge

Human Kinetics is known globally as the information leader in physical activity and health. Founded in 1974, the company publishes books, videos, software, and online education products designed to help its customers lead healthier, more active lives. The company’s founder, Rainer Martens, has served as an advisor to the U.S. Olympic team for almost two decades, and his company’s expertise is respected worldwide. Today, Human Kinetics has 320 employees across offices in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

Driven by the popularity of computing tablets and smartphones, the demand for digital content is greater than ever before. As Brad Trankina, director of network and information systems at Human Kinetics, describes, that demand has put unprecedented strain on the company’s data center. “Our industry is changing dramatically, and much more of our products are sold digitally,” he says. “To deliver that content, we have to be flexible and spin up servers or add resources fairly quickly.”

However, the aging infrastructure of the Human Kinetics data center could no longer keep up with changing business requirements. “We knew our equipment was outdated, and we were experiencing performance issues as a result,” Trankina says. “Even worse, when there was a problem, we had a hard time tracking it down and tying it to a particular hardware issue, like a memory slot or card that had gone bad.”

To illustrate these performance problems, Trankina describes a major system outage. “One incident took down our entire SQL environment for eight hours,” he says. “E-commerce is a huge part of our business, and all of our stores were unable to process orders, so this was a serious event for us.” Trankina and his team knew that it was time to look for another data center solution that offered better performance and stability.

“By virtualizing on the UCS platform, we have been able to save a considerable amount of money, because we dramatically decrease the number of servers required by our business while increasing capacity at the same time. Cisco solutions have been very cost effective for us.”

– **Brad Trankina**
Director of Network and Information Systems
Human Kinetics

Solution

After exploring several solutions, Human Kinetics chose Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS™) to update its data center environment. Given the company’s past experience with Cisco, the team’s decision was an easy one. “We were already using Cisco routers, switches, firewalls, and other solutions, so Cisco UCS seemed like an excellent choice,” Trankina says. “We value our strong relationship with Cisco, and that really helped solidify our decision.”

Now Human Kinetics utilizes Cisco® UCS B Series Blade Servers, Cisco Nexus® 5000 Series Switches, and a Cisco Catalyst® 6500 Switch. The company has also deployed Cisco 1000 Series Integrated Service Routers and Cisco ASA 5000 Series Adaptive Security Appliances. In fact, the company uses Cisco solutions across the board, from the network and data center, to unified communications and storage, to Fibre Channel over Ethernet (FCoE) architecture, and beyond.

During the planning and deployment phase, Human Kinetics worked with a gold-certified Cisco partner, the Burwood Group, to launch the project and streamline the migration process. “Burwood helped install the software and set up the initial configuration,” says Trankina. “The migration took about five days, start to finish, and we were ready to take it over and move on quickly from there.”

According to Trankina, Cisco UCS has proven to be an ideal platform for the company’s virtualization efforts. “We’re interested in virtualizing pretty much anything we can,” he says. “With UCS and our existing VMware environment, we’ve been able to virtualize a range of applications, including Microsoft SharePoint, Active Directory, and Microsoft Exchange, as well as multiple SQL Servers. We’re about 80 percent virtualized now, and the performance that UCS and VMware provide will allow us to push that even higher.”

In addition, Cisco solutions have enabled Human Kinetics to develop a variety of cloud-based services for its customers. The company has deployed Unified Communications on UCS, allowing it to streamline internal telecommunications as well as provide voicemail to customers. Human Kinetics also hosts email services, websites for 28 partner organizations, and 27 sports-related academic journals, as well as 10 external Human Kinetics websites across the business.

Overall, Trankina and his team find that UCS gives them the flexibility that they need to diagnose problems quickly and accommodate the company’s growth. “Now we can get in and really take a detailed look at what is going on inside the box, and it’s nice to have those extra memory slots. With UCS, we have a lot more capacity and freedom to deploy than we’d have with other solutions,” Trankina says. “Cisco’s hardware management tools and performance are unsurpassed.”

Results

After deploying Cisco data center solutions, Human Kinetics has been able to significantly reduce costs while improving performance and streamlining operations. Overall, Trankina estimates that the company has saved about 40 percent from the initial purchase. “By virtualizing on the UCS platform, we have been able to save a considerable amount of money, because we dramatically decrease the number of servers required by our business while increasing capacity at the same time. Cisco solutions have been very cost effective for us.”

Product List

Data Center Solutions

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)
 - Cisco UCS B200 M2 Blade Servers

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Nexus 5000, and 6000 Series Switches
- Cisco 6513 Core Switch
- Cisco 3925 Series Integrated Services Router
- Cisco 1002 Advanced Services Routers

Security

- Cisco ASA 5420 and 5540 Series Adaptive Security Appliances

Applications

- Microsoft Exchange
- Microsoft SharePoint Server
- Microsoft SQL Server
- Microsoft Active Directory
- DNS
- Webservers
- Print Server
- Cumulus 7 photo management
- Network Monitoring applications
- Adobe ColdFusion
- .NET applications

Once nearing a capacity crisis, Human Kinetics has the memory that it needs for all of its server workload. If memory requirements change, Trankina and his team can now provision resources 25 percent faster than before. “From a memory standpoint, we were at the threshold of service before we made the migration to UCS,” says Trankina. “Now we just have tons of resources available to allow us to grow the environment.”

Human Kinetics has also reduced its server requirements by 50 percent. “Now we can do on four servers what we once did on eight,” says Trankina, emphasizing how the company has been able to maximize capacity. “We are able to accomplish much more with less equipment. Each of the physical boxes has four times the memory and processing.”

This increased capacity has led to considerable improvements in system manageability. “We no longer need to take a server down to replace a card or update firmware,” says Trankina. “Now we are able to move the workload, using a fraction of the time to complete maintenance. This saves us a significant amount of money and resources.”

For Human Kinetics, these improvements have culminated in superior stability and performance, as well as an end to the lost data, and lost revenue, that affected the company before its migration to Cisco UCS. “UCS has been bulletproof for us,” Trankina says. “We have not had any kind of outages or issues at all, and we’ve been extremely satisfied.”

Next Steps

Looking ahead, Human Kinetics will continue working to stay at the forefront of digital publishing, a challenge that Trankina believes they are well-positioned to meet. “Our industry and company are changing, and now we have the capacity to meet those demands head on,” says Trankina. “With Cisco solutions in our data center, we feel prepared for the future.”

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Data Centers, visit: www.cisco.com/go/unifieddatacenter.

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

To find out more about Cisco Nexus Switches, visit: www.cisco.com/go/nexus.

This customer story is based on information provided by Human Kinetics 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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