success story

AstenJohnson relocates data center to Dimension Data's highly available outsourcing environment

"In selecting a hosting partner, what you're really paying for is people, skills and process. Any hosting company can buy hardware, software, and build an impressive data center, but we wanted more. We were looking for people who would care as much about our data as we do. Dimension Data fills that bill for us."

Rich Bermudez

Group Leader, Information Technology AstenJohnson

ASTENJOHNSON

With a recent corporate merger requiring the doubling of its IT environment, a legacy infrastructure spread around the country, and unpredictable hurricanes and power outages frequently threatening its headquarters' data center in Charleston, South Carolina, AstenJohnson was a prime outsourcing candidate.

Now the second largest paper machine-clothing manufacturer in North America, with manufacturing plants in 12 locations in Canada and the US, the 1999 merger of Asten and JWI Group precipitated a major change in the company's data center operation.

responding to a growing need

According to Rich Bermudez, Group Leader, Information Technology at AstenJohnson, "It was clear that we needed to keep pace with the growth the company was experiencing. The merger was one of the key drivers for change. We also were implementing the JD Edwards OneWorld manufacturing application, which requires a centralized server infrastructure. It all came together when management provided IT with the opportunity to start over and build a new solution, that we refer to as our 'highly effective information technology solution'."

Until the merger, the company's data center in Charleston consisted of a support function for employees' e-mail, file sharing and financials. Each manufacturing site had its own manufacturing application system. With the move to a centralized enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution, the reliance on the Charleston data center was escalating.

High availability was an important consideration in the decision to outsource the company's data center. Located on a scenic river near the coast, the existing site was hardly the best choice to expand the infrastructure. "We first looked at what we needed to keep the data center in-house – things like automatic generators, network

redundancy, running fuel-continuation contracts during evacuation periods. But as it turned out, to achieve the availability that we wanted was both cost prohibitive and impractical," Bermudez said.

people power

During an exhaustive search for outsourcing alternatives, Bermudez and his IT team decided to keep one key issue in mind – people. "We wanted to find people who would care about our data as much as we do," Bermudez explained. "We found that quality at Dimension Data. With all of our disparate infrastructure needs and unique characteristics, the people at Dimension Data made us feel quite secure and they reassured us that they could host our solution and help manage it like any other ERP environment. We knew it was definitely a good match."

Dimension Data is an international IT services company specializing in providing and managing shared IT infrastructures, and is an Elite member of Hewlett-Packard Company's Worldwide Services Provider Program. The focus of the program is to bring together the right partnerships with HP to offer flexible solutions that meet customers' needs. As a program member, Dimension Data is able to leverage many HP assets including consulting, support, solutions for integrated service management and HP's Always-On Internet Infrastructure Initiative.

solid partnership paves the way

"In addition to a good people-match, the decision to move all of our servers and applications from our in-house facility was based on our long-standing partnership with HP and Dimension Data's demonstrated experience in systems, network integration and managed services – each important considerations for us," Bermudez said. "Plus, HP and Dimension Data have a long-standing relationship since 1994, the success of which was a major factor in helping us to feel so confident."

AstenJohnson's IT configuration at Dimension Data is made up of an HP rp7400 server that is running the JD Edwards OneWorld application with an Oracle DBMS back-end database. An HP rp5450 server hosts the company's custom order-entry application, back-ended by a Sybase database.

As Bermudez explained, "We are in the process of transitioning the Sybase data over to another Oracle database and then we'll move both databases onto the HP rp7400 server. The HP rp5450 server will become an application server to off-load some of the back-end transaction processing from the HP rp7400. Both will serve as the foundation systems for OneWorld. The HP Unix servers are surrounded by five HP NetServer LT6000rs acting as terminal servers, running Microsoft Windows® NT and Citrix Metaframe software, together with seven additional HP Netservers running Microsoft Windows® NT supporting Lotus Notes, J.D. Edwards Deployment server, VPN Software, Primary Domain controller, and Cognos Web Reports, all of which will be located at the Dimension Data facility."

AstenJohnson utilizes an HP SureStore Virtual Array 7400 to handle its storage solution for the HP rp7400 server. The backup solution for the HP-UX data is an HP Surestore DLT 8000 Tape Library with the HP Netservers employing Surestore Ultrium 230 tape drives. HP OpenView Storage Data Protector is the backup management software of choice. Storage Data Protector provides instant recovery, eliminating unplanned downtime by maximizing data availability. This reduces cost by minimizing downtime associated with backup and recovery and as a result, increases revenue as business continuity is guaranteed. Storage Data Protector also delivers data protection for high availability and is scalable, allowing growth and flexibility, based on customer's needs.

"For disaster recovery purposes," Bermudez said, "we have a dedicated networking card in each of the HP rp servers routed back to one of our manufacturing facilities located in Georgia. At this facility, we have an HP 9000 K-Class server acting as a dedicated hot-backup environment and to avoid any impact upon our user community, this system receives its data updates via archive files transmitted over a private network. Should the Dimension Data facility suffer any outage we can quickly fail-over to this hot-backup environment."

Bermudez noted that the Dimension Data facility has many different aspects of redundancy built into it, including in the power sources and networking services. "We're a business that has low-volume orders, but an immense amount of valuable data per order, so we can handle a small window of downtime operating at 23 x 7 not 24 x 7. To help maintain our required availability, we have contracted with HP Services for Critical Systems Support on the OneWorld environment."

Bermudez and his team are able to monitor data center systems at the Dimension Data facility remotely and to realize substantial cost savings benefits. As Bermudez explained it, "All of our systems have monitoring agents installed. Dimension Data makes use of HP OpenView Storage Data Protector modules for that purpose, and all of the systems are connected into their centralized monitoring solution. As such, we are able to utilize our Charleston staff to focus on proactive projects versus maintaining the data center."

business benefits

Cost is measured against the quality of service and the level of competency provided by outsourcing to Dimension Data. Bermudez commented, "We are availing ourselves of the opportunity to achieve greater uptime with support from a very knowledgeable team.

solution highlights

- hp rp7400 server
- hp rp5450 server
- HP-UX 11i
- 5 hp NetServer LT6000r
- 1 hp Netserver LP2000r - Lotus Notes
- 2 hp Netserver LC2000 JD Edwards Deployment and Cognos Web Reports
- 1 hp Netserver LH6000r - Lotus Notes
- 3 hp Netserver LP1000r - VPN, Domain, Lotus Notes
- 1 hp 9000 K-Class servers (Warm recovery server in Georgia)
- hp Surestore Virtual Array 7400
- hp Surestore DLT 8000 Tape Library
- hp OpenView Storage Data Protector systems management software including Storage Data Protector backup software
- hp Critical Systems Support
- JD Edwards OneWorld manufacturing application
- Oracle database
- Sybase database
- Citrix Metaframesoftware
- Microsoft Windows® NT

Plus the level of expertise that's applied to our infrastructure is far broader than we could provide internally with our current staffing levels. I no longer have to hire industry experts to care for our various systems – Dimension Data furnishes us with all of the support we need."

Bermudez noted that the outsourced data center infrastructure offers a higher degree of redundancy, mitigating the weather-related and geographical risks associated with the Charleston data center. "In South Carolina with all the growth, someone is always digging and they seem to be forever cutting through our fiber cables. Because of the geography around here, it was impossible to get a separate local loop into our facility. Gaining network redundancy was a critical issue with us, something we're achieving with the Dimension Data set-up. And we have 365 x 24 monitoring. There's no way we could justify the cost of duplicating the number of monitoring tools the job requires, not to mention the cost to pay for someone to do the actual monitoring."

In conclusion, Bermudez stated, "The level of scalability offered by outsourcing with Dimension Data, with its managed network practice in place and our reliable HP solutions, better positions our company to expand here and abroad without fear of over-taxing our infrastructure. Our relationships have definitely helped us reach our goal of building a highly effective information technology solution for AstenJohnson."

For more information on how working with Hewlett-Packard can benefit you, contact your local HP service representative, or visit us through the Internet at our World Wide Web address: http://www.hp.com
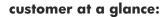
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"In mid-2001, we determined the need to do things a little differently to achieve our goal of creating a Highly Effective Information Technology Solution. With the dynamics created in our partnership with Dimension Data, the risk in achieving these goals has been greatly diminished."
**David Meek
CFO, AstenJohnson**

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