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Disaster Recovery with a Future-Ready Infrastructure

Empire Life modernizes its IT infrastructure and decreases recovery times from days to hours with the Fujitsu M10 server.



Fujitsu M10 servers

The ability to rapidly and completely recover from a major disaster is a must-have in any IT environment today. Companies must safeguard their internal data as well as that of their customers and be able to resume business quickly after an interruption in service. For insurance companies, which offer critical services in times of need, disaster recovery capabilities are even more imperative.

When Canada's Empire Life Insurance Company sought to replace its aging infrastructure with one that would enable it to be better prepared for worst-case scenarios, it chose to consolidate on the Fujitsu M10-1 server with the SPARC64 X+ processor. In the process, the company gained faster access to customers' financial data, simplified management of platforms through virtualization, and significant savings in ongoing maintenance costs.

A Need for Modernization

Founded in 1923, The Empire Life Insurance Company is among the top 10 life insurance companies in Canada, offering competitive individual and group life and health insurance, investment, and retirement products. With more than 690,000 individual customers and group life and health plan members as well as 815 group retirement plans, Empire Life helps Canadians build wealth and protect their financial security. Headquartered in Kingston, Ontario, Empire Life has approximately 1,000 employees and supports a network of almost 30,000 financial advisors and dealers, and manages approximately 14 billion Canadian dollars in financial assets.

In 2014, Empire Life found itself at a turning point. The IT team realized that the aging infrastructure—a number of older applications running on either physical or virtual SPARC servers—was

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no longer able to keep the business agile, support disaster recovery, and meet compliance regulations. Performance, management, backup, and disaster recovery-related capabilities needed to be overhauled to support the operational demands of the company. The existing infrastructure—almost four racks of servers—was nearing end of life and required a significant refresh.

To solve these issues, the team decided to fully virtualize and modernize its hardware environment.

“Our goal was to simplify the management of our existing systems and make them easier to deal with in terms of backup and disaster recovery,” says Jeff Babcock, manager of IT Infrastructure and Security at Empire Life. “Reducing our IT footprint and refreshing our hardware, as well as virtualizing some of those old platforms, were important to us.”

Inefficient, older hardware consumes a tremendous amount of power, cooling,

The Fujitsu M10-1 Server

The entry-level one rack unit (1U) Fujitsu M10-1 server from Oracle saves space while offering high performance and reliability. The highly efficient server delivers improvements in price performance and reduced lifecycle costs.

- The high-density, compact 1U chassis provides high performance through System on Chip technology.
- With midrange class performance, the Fujitsu M10-1 allows businesses to downsize from previous-generation midrange servers.
- Maintenance efforts and costs are reduced through improved processor and memory functions.
- Significant reductions in energy consumption are reflected in dramatically reduced datacenter costs.
- The SPARC64 X+ and SPARC64 X processors found in the Fujitsu M10 family allow for exceptionally high processor and memory reliability.
- The SPARC64 X+ and SPARC64 X processors protect application assets in former SPARC servers with conformity to the SPARC V9 architecture.

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and rack space and can quickly fall short in meeting the many infrastructure demands needed to support the business. Beyond the footprint costs, Empire Life recognized that moving to a modern infrastructure would also save on ongoing maintenance costs.

Higher Speeds, Lower Costs

During the needs assessment, Babcock and his team realized that they had the opportunity to consolidate everything down to a single server—one that would enable Empire Life’s existing Oracle Solaris 8, 9, and 10 servers to run simultaneously. Oracle Solaris Containers isolate software applications and services using flexible, software-defined boundaries, regardless of the underlying hardware. The solution allows for physical to virtual migrations of existing servers and, importantly, for consolidation to occur without making changes to the original server.

By consolidating to just a single Fujitsu M10-1 server with the SPARC64 X+ processor, Empire Life experienced an

estimated 92 percent savings in power usage and a 97 percent savings in rack space for the SPARC infrastructure.

“Through this project, we have been virtualizing our existing Solaris footprint so that we no longer are reliant on physical boxes,” says Babcock. “Our entire Solaris infrastructure is now designed to run on a single server occupying one unit of rack space.” The company has already transitioned many systems to the server, and plans to move over more systems—including insurance records databases—within the next few months.

Babcock has also witnessed a dramatic increase in the speed of applications that manage insurance and investment transactions and batch processing. As an example, a variety of complex reports that previously took more than a minute to execute now are completed in 10 seconds or less, providing tangible benefits to the business.

“The consolidation has reduced our processing windows, so critical customer

portfolio data is now up to date in real time,” says Babcock. “This has enabled us to better serve our customers.”

Compact and Powerful

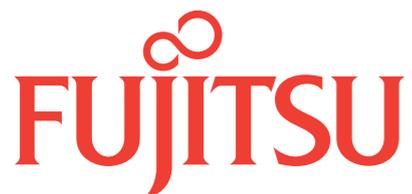
Babcock says that bringing key pieces of the SPARC infrastructure into a consolidated platform has led to simplified disaster recovery. “Behind the scenes, we’ve had some very notable performance improvements on the systems that we migrated to the new equipment,” says Babcock. “This includes easier management and reduced costs, as well as catching up in the virtualization space across all of our platforms.”

The company has substantially reduced recovery time objectives in the event of a large-scale disaster. Because configuring from scratch and recovering from backup tapes is a very long and painstaking process, the previous best-case scenario required days of downtime. With the new server,

Babcock says that time is reduced to hours or, in some cases, minutes. “By automating, standardizing, and modernizing disaster recovery, we’ll have access to a replicated copy of our data and will therefore be just a few simple recovery steps away from meeting our objectives. It will be much more straightforward when compared to our old manual recovery process,” says Babcock.

Overall, Babcock says the Fujitsu M10 server offers a versatile platform that packs in a tremendous amount of horsepower, given its small size.

“The Fujitsu M10-1 is a powerful tool,” says Babcock. “If you want to start small, you can grow with it through CPU core activation, which is a nice feature. It is about as dense as you could ask for, and its processing capabilities more than meet our needs. It is an excellent value, and we are extremely satisfied.”



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