FUJITSU

Case Study
Empire Life

»The Fujitsu M10-1 server is a powerful tool. If you want to start small, you can grow with it through CPU core activation, which is a nice feature.«

Jeff Babcock, Manager of IT Infrastructure, Empire Life

The customer

Country: Canada
Industry: Insurance
Founded: 1923
Employees: 900
Website: www.empire.ca

Empire Life

The challenge

Empire Life wanted to move to a fully virtualized and modern environment that would enable it to become much more agile, avoid potential compliance issues and be better prepared for worst-case scenarios. The company's existing environment included a number of Solaris-based applications running on either physical or virtual SPARC servers – mostly older, slower systems that could no longer support the needs of the organization and had reached end of life.

The solution

With support from Toronto-based HighVail, a full-service technology enabler, Empire Life was able to consolidate its existing SPARC infrastructure – almost four racks of servers - down to a single Fujitsu M10-1 server, enabling Empire Life to run existing Solaris 8, 9 and 10 environments on a single server. By consolidating to just a single Fujitsu M10-1 server with a SPARC64 X processor, Empire Life benefits from a 92 percent savings in power and a 97 percent savings in rack space.

The customer

Founded in 1923, The Empire Life Insurance Company (Empire Life) 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 partnerships with almost 30,000 professional financial advisors, brokers, managing general agents, group producers and mutual fund dealers across Canada.

Committed to simplicity and being easy to do business with, Empire Life recently launched the first online life insurance application process that includes underwriting, payment and e-signature components. Citing this new technology as well as ongoing product and service enhancements that support customer satisfaction, Empire Life was named the Best Life Insurance Company in Canada in 2014 by World Finance magazine for a second year in a row.

The challenge

Empire Life found itself at a technology turning point. As it becomes more digitally focused, a move to a fully virtualized and modern environment would enable it to become much more agile, avoid potential compliance issues and be better prepared for worst-case scenarios. "Empire Life IT is heavily involved in business system transaction processing. We have thousands of different processing jobs and transactions which are critical to our business operations," said Jeff Babcock, Manager of IT Infrastructure.

The company's existing environment included a number of Solaris-based applications running on either physical or virtual SPARC servers – mostly older, slower systems that could no longer support the needs of the organization and which had reached end of life.

As part of Empire Life's ongoing effort to advance its technology footprint, the IT team realized that performance, management, backup and disaster recovery-related capabilities needed to be overhauled to support the operational demands of the company. The existing SPARC infrastructure – almost four racks of servers – was nearing end of life and required a significant refresh. Jeff Babcock notes, "Our goal was to simplify the management of our existing infrastructure with easier backup and disaster recovery. Reducing footprint, refreshing hardware as well as virtualizing some of those old platforms were all important to us."

The benefit

- Consolidated almost four racks of SPARC servers down to a single Fujitsu M10-1 (able to run existing Oracle Solaris 8, Solaris 9 and Solaris 10 environments on the same physical server)
- Estimated 92 percent savings in power and a 97 percent saving in rack space
- Easy growth through CPU core activation
- Simplified disaster recovery with easier management and reduced costs

Products and services

- Fujitsu M10-1 server
- Oracle Solaris
- Oracle VM Server for SPARC
- Oracle Solaris Containers

Inefficient, older hardware consumes a tremendous amount of power, cooling 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 recurring maintenance costs.

The solution

Managing a major technology transition while maintaining day-to-day business deliverables proved to be out of scope for the Empire Life IT team. Jeff Babcock shares, "We quickly came to realize that HighVail (a full service technology enabler based in Toronto) has a broad set of knowledge in many areas where we don't necessarily have the in-house expertise or the time available for special projects. HighVail was a good fit for us because of their depth of experience in the infrastructure space."

During the needs assessment, the opportunity to consolidate everything down to a single server – one that would enable Empire Life's existing Solaris 8, 9 and 10 environments to run simultaneously – emerged. 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 environment.

The benefit

It was determined that by consolidating to just a single Fujitsu M10-1 server with a SPARC64 X processor, Empire Life would experience an estimated 92 percent savings in power and a 97 percent savings in rack space for their SPARC infrastructure. Jeff Babcock shares, "Through this project we have been virtualizing our existing Solaris footprint so that we no longer are reliant on physical boxes. Our entire Solaris infrastructure is now designed to run on a single server occupying one unit of rack space." A large number of systems have already been transitioned and the balance will be completed early in 2016.

HighVail worked with Empire Life to migrate a variety of back-end, administrative systems for business-critical functions such as batch processing. After the migration, in some cases reports that took several minutes to run are now executed in seconds. Jeff Babcock notes, "Behind the scenes, we've had some very notable performance improvements on the systems that we migrated to the new equipment. With HighVail's support, we have taken the key pieces of our SPARC infrastructure onto a much more consolidated platform to bring about benefits for simplified disaster recovery. This includes easier management and reduced costs, as well as catching up in the virtualization space across all of our platforms."

A HighVail project manager worked directly with key members of Empire Life's IT team, managing deliverables as well as ensuring regular and thorough communications throughout the project lifecycle. Recognizing the limited time windows for IT work, HighVail team members worked evenings and weekends to ensure that the infrastructure project would not impact business-as-usual activities.

"There was formal knowledge transfer at the end of the project, but also throughout the entire process," Jeff Babcock shares. "Our IT team got along very well with the HighVail team – they have a helpful, friendly, can-do attitude backed by solid expertise. It's a tremendous advantage to have a solid working relationship across the teams. We have a statement of work in progress to do additional work on our new platform for disaster recovery." Working with HighVail on a second phase, Empire Life looks forward to automating, standardizing and modernizing their disaster recovery processes to significantly reducing recovery time in the event of a large-scale disaster.

Conclusion

"The Fujitsu M10-1 server is a powerful tool. 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 - we are extremely satisfied."

Jeff Babcock, Manager of IT Infrastructure, Empire Life