



RED HAT HELPS THE TRAVEL CHANNEL MAKE GREAT STRIDES ON A TIGHT BUDGET

FAST FACTS

Company	The Travel Channel
Industry	Media
Geography	Washington, D.C.
Business Challenge	Build an entire IT infrastructure from scratch within 90 days using minimal financial and personnel resources
Software	Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform, and JBoss Enterprise Application Platform, Red Hat Satellite, VMware
Hardware	Dell PowerEdge 2950 servers
Benefits	Enable the rapid build and fast deployment of a brand-new IT infrastructure and application platform; contain operational costs; minimize capital investment; and ensure the reliability of mission-critical applications



BACKGROUND

Launched in 1987, the award-winning Travel Channel is the only television network devoted exclusively to travel. As the flagship product of Travel Channel Media, an integrated multi-platform travel business owned by Cox Communications, the Travel Channel is available in more than 90 million U.S. homes and targets a broad range of audiences. Its innovative programming appeals equally to experienced travelers looking for exciting new venues to explore; beginning travelers seeking tips on getting started; and armchair travelers who enjoy living vicariously through others' adventures. The Travel Channel's sister businesses under the Travel Channel Media umbrella include travelchannel.com, the network's broadband travel hub; Travel Channel's video-on-demand and mobile platforms; and World Hum (worldhum.com), a leading online travel blog.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Until December 31, 2007, the Travel Channel was owned and operated by the Discovery Channel, and was dependent upon its parent company to provide and manage all its IT resources. But upon being acquired by Cox Communications, the Travel Channel needed to put its own IT infrastructure in place—and it had to do it fast. Due to Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) regulations, the Travel Channel needed to have fully functional systems within 90 days of closing the deal, or face a \$300,000,000 fine.

In addition to this looming deadline, the Travel Channel was under pressure of another sort. Its biggest annual event is a live simulcast of its popular “Most Haunted” show on television and the Web. In previous years “Most Haunted Live” had experienced some technical setbacks due to problems with the reliability of the company’s IT infrastructure. “It was critical that our 2008 event run smoothly, or my department would be held accountable,” said Ryan McCormack, senior systems architect at the Travel Channel, who oversees all middleware implementations as well as the design of all the applications tools for Travel Channel business users.

As with almost every other business in these difficult economic times, cost was also an issue. With a relatively small IT staff – just seven workers, including McCormack – the Travel Channel had to efficiently leverage its IT professionals’ time to contain operational costs. Additionally, since the Travel Channel wanted to preserve capital for other, strategic business initiatives, Travel Channel did not want to invest in costly proprietary hardware and software. “Senior IT management made the decision early on to go with open source,” said McCormack.

SOLUTION

With help from a third-party systems consultant and Dell – Cox Communications’ primary hardware supplier – the Travel Channel built a brand new infrastructure and applications platform based upon industry-standard Intel Dell PowerEdge 2950 server hardware, Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform, and JBoss Enterprise Application Platform, all running in a virtualized VMware environment. More recently, the Travel Channel implemented Red Hat Satellite to help manage its growing installation of Red Hat Enterprise Linux systems.

“The fact that Dell is a strategic partner of Red Hat, and has extensive experience implementing Red Hat Enterprise Linux and JBoss on its hardware helped us enormously as we rushed to meet our 90-day deadline,” said McCormack.

“There’s no way we could have delivered what we’ve delivered without Red Hat’s enterprise application suite and the professionals that helped provide the business automation for rapid deployment.”

**- Ryan McCormack,
senior systems architect,
the Travel Channel**



BENEFITS

McCormack's group, which supports www.travelchannel.com and the television broadcast unit of the Travel Channel, performed a head-to-head comparison of Red Hat Enterprise Linux running on Intel hardware against Sun Solaris running on SPARC machines. Red Hat won hands down – both in terms of cost and reliability. "Going the proprietary route would have cost us three times as much money," said McCormack.

Another big issue was "supportability." "We have more than 200 servers, and attempting to support them in a Solaris environment was simply not feasible," McCormack said. "In addition to the availability of workers skilled in the Red Hat Enterprise Linux environment, there's just the fact that the Red Hat Enterprise Linux environment is easier to manage with less people."

The Travel Channel was able to make its 90-day deadline. But because the first iteration of the new infrastructure was done so quickly, six months later McCormack's team revisited it and fine-tuned it to achieve greater reliability and higher performance. It then implemented Red Hat Satellite to rebuild the www.travelchannel.com portal. "Thanks to Red Hat Satellite, we were able to create a very tight server image – including all the JBoss libraries – and do the rebuild within just six days," he said. Prior to this change, the Travel Channel was only about to run 24 concurrent transactions. "Now we can do more than 25,000 concurrent transactions using only a three-node cluster," he said.

Choosing to run JBoss on Red Hat Enterprise Linux saved the Travel Channel significant dollars over proprietary alternatives. "And the quality of JBoss is very high, and constantly getting better," said McCormack.

The Travel Channel's future plans involve ever-greater use of Red Hat products. Among other things, this involves upgrading to 64-bit Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5.2. "Currently, 80 percent of the Travel Channel's infrastructure runs on Red Hat Enterprise Linux; another 10 percent will shortly transition to it; and over the next six months we'll be moving all our databases over to that environment," McCormack said.

And the Red Hat Enterprise Linux-based platform came through with flying colors for the 2008 "Most Haunted Live" event – on which the Travel Channel spent 30 percent of its annual operating budget. "Our Red Hat team really took a leadership role in helping us streamline and do performance tuning of the new platform for that event," said McCormack. "We never got above 30 percent utilization during the broadcast. Everything ran perfectly, and it turned out to be our best live event ever."

Indeed, McCormack attributes much of the success of his team over the past 12 months to Red Hat. "There's no way we could have delivered what we've delivered without Red Hat's enterprise application suite and the professionals that helped provide the business automation for rapid deployment," he said.



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