



HEALTHPLAN SERVICES MIGRATES FROM SOLARIS TO RED HAT ENTERPRISE LINUX TO INCREASE PERFORMANCE AND DECREASE COSTS

FAST FACTS

Customer	HealthPlan Services (HPS)
Geography	North America
Industry	Healthcare
Migration Path	Sun Solaris to Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform; Sun SPARC servers to virtualized Linux instances on HP DL380 servers
Software	Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform with built-in Red Hat Cluster Suite and Red Hat Global File System (GFS), Red Hat Network, Apache webserver, MySQL databases, IBM DB2
Hardware	HP ProLiant DL380 servers
Benefits	Increase performance and usability, enhance support, and reduce costs with a Solaris to Red Hat Enterprise Linux migration on HP ProLiant servers

HealthPlan Services

BACKGROUND

HealthPlan Services (HPS) is the nation's largest independent provider of service and technology solutions to the insurance and managed care industries. HPS offers customized administration and distribution services to insurers in the individual, small group, and voluntary markets supporting health insurance and ancillary product lines (i.e., dental, life, disability, accident, cancer, etc.).

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

HPS faced three major business challenges with its aging Sun Solaris on SPARC hardware with RISC architecture. First, the Sun UNIX-based solution delivered limited application performance and support. In one year, HPS dealt with four service degrading incidents. Second, the escalating cost of the SPARC systems were becoming a drag on HPS' limited IT budget. Third, employees were experiencing slow response times, and the developers complained about usability issues with the Solaris operating system.

HPS needed an operating system that could interoperate with Microsoft Windows Active Directory, and desired a reliable platform that optimized performance and was easy to upgrade. Because its customer service applications were experiencing page loading delays, HPS needed to increase computing performance to meet the needs of its customers and employees.

SOLUTION

Adam Atkinson, HPS' UNIX administrator, manages some 200 web, database, and FTP servers, 30 of which were pure UNIX systems utilizing Solaris 9 on Sun SPARC servers. After recognizing the organization's UNIX systems were becoming outdated and obsolete, Atkinson decided to conduct research to find a high-performing alternative solution.

Atkinson investigated three primary options for the HPS operating system migration: Novell SUSE, Solaris 10, and Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform. Quickly eliminating Novell SUSE because it was not a standard in his organization, the decision came to Solaris 10 and Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform. Atkinson decided to run benchmarks to compare the operating platforms. His testing revealed that Red Hat Enterprise Linux was superior for each benchmark. Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform ran pages at more than three times the speed (452 pages per second) of Solaris (135 pages per second) in one test. "That's a massive difference," said Atkinson.

In addition to performance testing, cost was also a primary consideration in identifying a solution. When comparing Solaris 10 and Red Hat Enterprise Linux, the optimal platform was obvious. "Upgrading Solaris is hard to do. With a migration to Solaris 10, due to high costs associated with SPARC servers, we would have needed to migrate our hardware platform from SPARC to Intel, which would have required me to recompile nearly all of my modules and applications. If we were going to make a big technology move like what Solaris 10 would have required, we decided to look at all of our opportunities, and that meant hosting Red Hat Enterprise Linux on HP ProLiant servers became a truly viable option for us," said Atkinson.

Atkinson, who was familiar with Red Hat's usability benefits, also evaluated support comparisons between Red Hat and Sun. "Solaris support is fine as long as you're using new equipment and Sun's latest operating system version, but you will pay an extreme premium as soon as your version begins to age. We did not use Sun's Solaris support

because it was too expensive. Instead, we had third-party support." HPS recognized a cost savings in Red Hat's subscription model and was especially impressed with Red Hat's patch management and package management capabilities available through the reliable Red Hat Network systems management platform.

Another valuable advantage provided by Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform is the solution's integrated Red Hat Cluster Suite and Red Hat Global File System (GFS) technologies for no added price. Red Hat Global File System is comparable in speed and performance to Veritas. But, Veritas comes with an added cost and additional vendor relationship, while with Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform, HPS would receive its file system clustering solution integrated with the operating system free of charge.

"Red Hat's integrated file system clustering technology was important to us. I was paying Veritas for support every year, whereas with GFS through Red Hat, it's free with my subscription and the support is there too," said Atkinson.

The cost and time savings delivered by Red Hat Enterprise Linux, coupled with the solution's enhanced performance and support, as well as the increased ease of use for customers and employees, convinced Atkinson, his team, and his company to select Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Platform to replace its unreliable Solaris systems.

HPS is currently in the process of migrating to Red Hat Enterprise Linux on HP ProLiant DL380 servers with virtualization capabilities, superior uptime and effortless management. The company expects Red Hat to be fully in production in August 2009. "We're moving our systems technology-to-technology instead of server-to-server in more of a piecemeal fashion. It's more consumable to us that way," said Atkinson.



BENEFITS

HPS is most excited about the impending performance benefits that will result from its migration away from Solaris to Red Hat Enterprise Linux. "The speed is going to increase: we'll see people working faster, and we'll be able to process more claims, all by switching an operating system. I can't believe it was that cut and dry," said Atkinson. The company also recognized great benefits in the general manageability of Red Hat Enterprise Linux. "To stage a Solaris server, it takes a lot of time to do even simple tasks," said Atkinson. "Red Hat frees up my time. Tasks that took 30 minutes with Solaris take five minutes with Red Hat. Installing one package across all systems with Red Hat might take an hour, as opposed to a full day with Solaris."

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**- Adam Atkinson, UNIX administrator
at Healthplan Services**

The collaboration of the vast open source community is expected to provide an additional benefit to HPS with the Red Hat migration. With the open source community, innovation happens more quickly and provides greater technology enhancements than the alternative proprietary model. "If I run a search for a quick 'Solaris' fix, I might get 10 results as opposed to the thousands I receive when I search 'Red Hat,'" said Atkinson. Red Hat takes the innovation that happens in the community and certifies and tests the technology so that HPS knows it will work seamlessly in its IT infrastructure. With the backing of Red Hat support and the consistent management capabilities provided by Red Hat Network, Atkinson and his coworkers save time, which allows the reallocation of staff resources to more business-critical tasks.

HPS is expecting a three-year return on investment (ROI) once its full Red Hat Enterprise Linux migration is complete. "After three years, we'll be generating money," said Atkinson. "I feel that we will immediately see an increase of revenue with the speed difference. The return on investment being three years is purely technology, we will see it much sooner at the business level."

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