Medical Group Saves Space, Time with Simplified Branch Office IT

Cisco Unified Computing System consolidates, centralizes network management for eye, ear, nose, and throat specialists.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Charlotte Eye, Ear, Nose & Throat Associates

Industry: Healthcare

Location: Greater Charlotte area, North Carolina

Number of employees: 600

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Reduce IT footprint, including use of space and power consumption, at branch locations
- Centralize network management and maintenance, consolidate service contract coverage

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Expansion of Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) platform from data center to branches
- Replacement of standalone branch servers with router-integrated UCS Express Blade Servers

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Reduced downtime through simplified, centralized management of remote servers and other equipment
- Reduced maintenance burdens on IT staff

Partner: Katalyst

Business Challenge

Founded in 1923, Charlotte Eye, Ear, Nose & Throat Associates (CEENTA) is one of the oldest specialty medical providers in North Carolina. With some 600 employees, including 70 physicians, at 16 locations in the greater Charlotte area, CEENTA treats about 540,000 patients annually.

With a network that links its 16 locations, CEENTA maintains a primary data center at the organization's main facility and a secondary data center at another location about 20 miles away. Critical applications such as electronic medical record-keeping, run centrally on a VMware platform, are pushed out to the branches via Citrix. Voice services are also centralized. Each of the branches is equipped with a Cisco router and Cisco Catalyst® 2960 Series switches. In addition, each branch has traditionally housed a Dell server to handle domain authentication, file and print services, Domain Name System (DNS), Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP), and local application hosting.

When CEENTA's sites were due for a hardware upgrade, the organization's director of IT, Brad Craig, and his colleagues were in the practice of simply replacing the existing servers with aging servers that they were rotating out of their data centers or low-end models that they would buy and configure online and have shipped to the branches. But that practice had some drawbacks.

"One was a simple issue of real estate," Craig says. "Those servers were taking up rack space in facilities without a lot of room for networking and other IT equipment."

A more troublesome issue was management and maintenance. "With 16 locations and an IT staff of nine, we can't be onsite at every location all the time," says Craig. "For upgrades and problem-solving, we had to send IT staffers to a location, or else work over the phone with someone from the medical or services staff to reboot a server or troubleshoot a problem, which is not very efficient."

Finally, with a mixture of equipment at each location, Craig and his colleagues had to deal with multiple vendors and support contracts. "We wanted to consolidate our IT infrastructure and simplify its management at the same time," he says.

So when, about a year ago, most of CEENTA's branches were due for a server upgrade, they considered their options.

Network Solution

But the options offered little in the way of consolidation or simplicity. Two hardware vendors proposed updated, smaller servers for CEENTA's branches; a networking equipment company pitched its acceleration services as a solution. Either of those options meant another service contract with yet another vendor. Neither of them offered a clear road map to a simpler, more manageable network infrastructure that could accommodate more services in the future.

As it happened, however, Craig and his colleagues had already installed Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS®), a next-generation data center platform that unites computing, networking, storage access, and virtualization in a single, cohesive system, in the CEENTA data center. CEENTA's UCS installation consists of a Cisco® 5100 Series Blade Server Chassis, UCS Manager for centralized management of the platform, and a UCS B-200 Blade Server to support optimal application performance and virtualization.

> "The fundamental benefit of the Cisco Unified Compute System is that it's so easy. You might even say it's boring. But it works great. In IT solutions, 'boring' is a virtue."
> **— Brad Craig, Director of Information Technology, CEENTA**

So when the CEENTA IT managers heard that Cisco was about to introduce Unified Computing System Express (UCS Express), a blade server for the Cisco Integrated Services Router Generation 2 (ISR G2) that is expressly designed to simplify branch office infrastructure, they recognized the solution they were looking for.

"Cisco UCS Express offered us several clear advantages, from ease of deployment and management to the integration of virtualization," says Craig. "As a long-time VMware customer, integrating UCS Express into our VMware environment was easy for us.

“Per location, the cost was about the same as buying an equivalent standalone server,” he adds. Because CEENTA’s branch routers were also due for a refresh, Craig and his colleagues decided to upgrade each location to a Cisco 2921 ISR G2, with a Cisco blade server installed in the router.

The deployment itself was straightforward. The CEENTA IT staff configured the new Cisco routers and UCS Express blades themselves (“The documentation was great,” says Craig), and installed them at the branches during nonbusiness hours. It took only about an hour at each site.

PRODUCT LIST

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) data center platform, consisting of:
  - Cisco 5100 Series Blade Server Chassis
  - Cisco UCS B-200 Blade Server
  - Cisco UCS Manager
- Cisco Catalyst 2960 Series Switches
- Cisco 2921 Integrated Services Routers Generation 2 (ISR G2s) with UCS Express Cisco Services Ready Engines (SREs)
- Cisco SmartNet service contract

Business Results

By consolidating each branch server with the onsite router, the Cisco ISR G2 with UCS Express solution has reduced IT real estate issues, as well as power consumption, at every location. “One of our priorities is to shrink our IT footprint wherever we can,” says Craig, “and this deployment is a big step in that direction.”

Just as important from a resource management point of view, the CEENTA IT staff can now manage the entire network centrally. “We can view and manage all the remote servers from the data center,” says Craig. “If there’s a problem at a branch, we don’t have to call the site and ask questions of a non-IT person like we used to. Instead of hours, fixing the problem takes a few minutes and a few clicks from here.”

In addition, all of CEENTA’s Cisco equipment, including the UCS Express blades, are covered under one service contract.

“The fundamental benefit of the Cisco Unified Compute System is that it’s so easy,” says Craig. “You might even say it’s boring. But it works great. In IT solutions, ‘boring’ is a virtue.”

He and his colleagues are looking forward to consolidating and centralizing the management of CEENTA’s network even further. “We’re not only sold on the UCS products we’ve put in place, we’re also excited about what we’ve seen of Cisco’s roadmap for UCS,” says Craig.

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco UCS Express, go to: http://www.cisco.com/go/ucse.

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