Customer Case Study

Financing Firm Leverages UCS for Improved Scalability and Performance

Executive Summary

- **Customer Name:** Credit Acceptance Corporation
- **Industry:** Financial Services
- **Location:** Southfield, Michigan
- **Number of Employees:** 1100

Challenge

- Scale computing, storage, and networking infrastructure for aggressive, long-term growth
- Improve systems reliability and manageability
- Enhance user experiences through increased performance

Solution

- Created unified data center by standardizing on Cisco Unified Network technology

Results

- Supported strategic initiative to originate 600,000 new loans annually
- Improved systems reliability and reduced network incidences by 90 percent
- Generated US$1.2 million in cost savings as compared to standardizing on other data center solutions

Cisco Unified Network solutions eliminate barriers for success and growth for Credit Acceptance Corporation.

Challenge

Since the first car rolled off the assembly line, auto manufacturers, designers, and dealerships have all strived to deliver innovative vehicles that fit consumers' unique lifestyles. Along the way, finance agencies and credit companies have played an increasingly important role in helping motorists achieve their dreams of car ownership.

In 1972, Credit Acceptance Corporation (CACC) began working with dealerships to help buyers finance the cars they wanted. Over time, the company has grown into one of the leading specialty automotive credit agencies in the United States. "We want to help all consumers receive fair financing on their vehicles, as well as provide them with the tools necessary to bolster their credit," says Rael Mussell, director of IT for CACC. "Integral to the success of our services is delivering immediate responses to dealerships and their customers to help enhance the car-buying experience, as well as streamline repayment solutions."

As CACC has grown, the company's commitment to outstanding services had stretched its IT infrastructure to capacity, creating risks of service outages and delayed response times. Additionally, with the company's previous IT strategy of adopting disparate storage, compute, and networking technology, its IT infrastructure had become complex and required specialists to manage the different solutions. Over time, CACC had assembled a team of more than 175 IT staff to manage systems, develop applications, and provide support.

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– **Mike Hurst**
Infrastructure Architect
Credit Acceptance Corporation

IT complexity was also limiting business performance. For instance, if an individual system failed, CACC IT could spend days reviewing several layers of technology, contacting multiple vendors, and bringing in specialists to identify and resolve problems. Less-than-ideal integration between components also created challenges for system architects to scale with business needs.

"We've sustained growth of up to 30 percent annually over the past several years," says Mike Hurst, infrastructure architect at Credit Acceptance. "Existing technologies and IT strategies couldn't keep pace with the aggressive goals set out by executives, let alone our continued growth."

Solution

In 2009, the CACC IT team began evaluating several solutions from its existing hardware vendors, including HP and Dell; they knew that they needed to look beyond unintegrated systems and adopt a more robust, comprehensive solution. Additionally, the company wanted to adopt a stateless architecture that would better support virtualization and improve network scalability.

After a rigorous assessment process, CACC chose to standardize on Cisco® Unified Data Center solutions to streamline IT management, enhance integration across systems, and provide critical scalability and performance."We already viewed Cisco as a trusted provider of proven networking solutions," says Hurst. "We were really impressed when we saw the UCS data center solutions in action; everything was virtually plug-and-play. That, combined with the advanced management capabilities in UCS and Cisco's partnerships with EMC and VMware, we knew it was a recipe for success."

Within its primary data center in Southfield, Michigan, the company implemented a mixture of Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS™) B200, B230, and B250 Blade Servers in Cisco UCS 5108 chassis, connected by Cisco UCS 6120 and 6248 Fabric Interconnects, Cisco MDS 9509 Multilayer Fabric Switches, and Cisco Nexus® 1000v Switches. At its disaster recovery site in Henderson, Nevada, CACC uses two Cisco UCS 5108 chassis with ten B200 Series Blade Servers and two Cisco UCS 6248 Fabric Interconnects for failover for its telephony systems and data backup. The company also chose to use EMC storage solutions and VMware virtualization technology to further integrate network, storage, and virtualization strategies within a unified Vblock architecture.

By adopting Cisco Unified Data Center technology and a Vblock architecture, CACC created an integrated, easily managed environment that supports the company's initiatives to increase virtualization and deliver more private, cloud-based services. Along with the solution's ability to boot from SAN, Cisco UCS Manager enables network managers at all levels to rapidly integrate new hardware, provision resources, identify and respond to system issues, and deliver applications and services faster.

Cisco UCS solutions now run all of the company's critical business applications, including its patented Credit Approval Processing System (CAPS), which provides instant approvals to car buyers at dealerships, as well as its loan servicing system (LSS), Microsoft Windows Active Directory and SharePoint, and its Oracle data warehouse. Through its unified network, CACC also supports a Citrix VDI infrastructure for employees, helping to reduce costs and improve system responsiveness.

Results

Ambitious goals, powerful solutions

Since implementing Cisco Unified Network solutions, the company has aggressively grown its business from originating approximately 100,000 new loans annually to more than 180,000 each year, as well as better servicing of new and existing accounts. Because of the rapidly scalable infrastructure, CACC can realistically look to achieve its goal of servicing more than 600,000 new loans annually by 2018. "Achieving such an aggressive goal before implementing Cisco UCS would have been a challenge," says Hurst. "The power and flexibility of Cisco UCS and its proven support for virtualization are critical to our success. Cisco reliably supports our business today and in the future."

Hurst also noted how Cisco Unified Network technology could support upwards of 18 million loans within the CACC network, making it fast and easy to add new UCS servers at a moment's notice. "Previously, our hardware and network limited our business growth and success," says Hurst. "With Cisco UCS, IT is now seen as a business enabler across the organization."

Increased scalability is only one of the advantages of using Cisco UCS at CACC. Through simplified network management, CACC has been able to redirect IT staffing resources to other high-value activities, including repositioning them as developers, and technology and business specialists. "We used to play the role of more of a systems manager," says Hurst. "Now, we are regarded as active influencers in the company's ongoing success, helping to shape growth and bring greater value to dealer and customer relationships."

Improvements in application and database server functionality

Cohesive integration between Cisco UCS and the company's Oracle server infrastructure has proven highly beneficial in terms of time, energy, and money. The firm is running Oracle WebLogic Server and Oracle Application Services in a 100 percent virtualized environment. Oracle Database 11gR2 servers underpin the firms data warehouse, and everything is virtualized in both Oracle Real Application Clusters (RAC) and single instance running.

During peak times, the IT team uses templates created in VMware specific to Oracle servers to accurately, consistently, and rapidly provision servers and move workloads across Cisco UCS blades in production, as well as in test and development environments. "All our service profiles are created from a master template. The quick turn-up and accurate provisioning have proven to be a tremendous asset for us. We know that when we need to expand a cluster for extra capacity that the new blade will have all the configuration requirements needed for an Oracle cluster. We do not need to double-check a Service Profile," says Hurst.

CACC has lowered its Oracle license costs due to decreased physical application and database server counts at farms (a 75 percent reduction in farm footprints) and decreased power consumption. Additionally, the company has noted much faster batch-processing speeds, which staff attributes to the new EMC array as well as the Cisco UCS implementation. Some of the greatest advantages of Cisco UCS as it relates to server architecture is that IT staff does not have to reconfigure operating systems or install any software when new servers are purchased, and VMware hosts are instantly upgraded with minimal time spent on configuration and installation.

Product List

Unified Computing solutions:

- Cisco UCS B200, B230, and B250 Blade Servers
- Cisco 5108 Server Chassis

Unified Fabric solutions:

- Cisco Nexus 5548 Switches
- Cisco UCS 6120 Fabric Interconnect
- Cisco MDS 9509 Multilayer Fabric Switch
- Cisco Nexus 1000v Switches

Management solutions

- Cisco UCS Manager
- VMware vMotion

Security and VPN

- Cisco ASA 5520 Adaptive Security Appliance

Storage

- EMC

Virtualization

- VMware

Applications

- Oracle WebLogic Server
- Oracle Application Services

Faster deployment, increased reliability

Standardizing its data center on Cisco UCS has also accelerated application deployment and improved business continuity. When it standardized on Cisco UCS, CACC used pre-built server profiles in Cisco UCS Manager and VMware vMotion to condense 230 physical servers onto six Cisco UCS servers in just one day. And using the same approach today, the company's IT can quickly scale to add new servers, as well as replace, upgrade, or maintain its systems.

"The increased memory density of Cisco UCS improved our growth strategy and our disaster recovery efforts by allowing us to adapt quickly to changing business needs or network events," says Mussell. "In addition, since implementing Cisco UCS, we've seen dramatic increases in systems reliability and a 90 percent reduction in network incidences." For example, when the company recently experienced a system event that affected a small group of users, network managers could quickly identify, respond to, and repair the issues within a seven-minute window.

CACC's investment in Cisco UCS technology has significantly improved its bottom line. "With Cisco UCS, we've seen total cost of ownership for our network drop by $1.2 million compared to other solutions we considered," says Mussell. The integrated Cisco solution has also reduced the company's data center footprint by 75 percent, supporting future growth without additional real estate investments.

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Data Center solutions, go to: www.cisco.com/go/dc.

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