Electrical Wholesaler Transforms Data Center with Cisco Solutions

Executive Summary

- **Customer Name:** Van Meter, Inc.
- **Industry:** Electrical wholesale distribution and industrial automation
- **Location:** Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Cottage Grove, Minnesota
- **Number of Employees:** ~600

Challenge
- Achieving greater value from data center investments
- Streamlining IT management
- Improving data center performance and scalability

Solution
- Centralizing data center environment using Cisco Unified Data Center solutions, including scalable Cisco UCS
- Enabling remote management of virtualized assets to simplify IT management

Results
- Improved system and application performance by 50 percent
- Simplified data center management and enabled IT staff to focus on higher-value business activities
- Achieved greater value from new Cisco UCS solution and previous IT investments

Cisco UCS enables Van Meter, Inc. to optimize IT investments, performance, and operations.

Challenge

Since its beginnings in a 3200-square-foot building in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Van Meter, Inc. has continued to build on its rich tradition of innovation and service-first business culture to expand its footprint throughout the midwestern United States. The company's trademark has always been its best-in-class, comprehensive product offerings, from electrical and lighting to datacomm and automation, combined with quality support services.

"We're not a typical wholesale distributor," says Dan Rammelsberg, network engineer at Van Meter, Inc. "One of the key differentiators for the company is our ability to provide greater value for our customers through energy auditing, design services, project estimation, and other advanced services that require employees to be more responsive and have instant access to business-critical tools."

Supporting the company's expanding catalog of products and services, Van Meter historically took the approach of building out its physical network infrastructure, adding new servers as applications, staffing, and data grew. To combat data center sprawl and network obstructions, the company wanted to bring virtualization to its data center and adopt a more sustainable, scalable infrastructure.

> "Cisco UCS delivers, by far, the best balance between value and performance on the market today."
>
> — **Jason Sinclair**
> Systems Engineer
> Van Meter, Inc.

In addition to adding new applications and network services, Van Meter is growing through increased sales and acquisitions. After assuming a 50 percent stake in Werner Electric Supply of Minnesota, the company quickly realized how the added personnel and expanding network of offices would further stress its IT infrastructure. As a result, the company began seeing lapses in application performance and systems reliability. Also, dispersed offices without on-site IT support added to the challenge of managing an increasingly successful, growing business.

"Our IT staff is in our Cedar Rapids office and supports branches more than 250 miles away. If a component goes down, we need to be able to manage those assets remotely," says Rammelsberg. "If a server went down, the service or application could be down for a full day or longer depending on its location. In turn, customers could be waiting for products, services, and answers." The company's IT team recognized the need to centrally manage remote assets and saw an opportunity to provide a central hub for collaboration and file sharing to enhance customer service and boost employee productivity.

Solution

After considering computing solutions from the incumbent vendor, Van Meter managers chose Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS™) solutions to rapidly consolidate and centralize its data center. By leveraging Cisco® UCS, the company could create a high-performance data center that readily integrates powerful network, compute, and data capabilities into a more compact, easily managed IT infrastructure. The Cisco solutions would enhance the company's virtualization efforts and offered several other advantages, including proven, highly scalable memory and reliable hardware to support long-term IT success.

For its main data center at the company's Cedar Rapids headquarters, Van Meter chose to deploy five Cisco UCS C250 Servers, four running in a cluster for its production environment and one to manage its resource-intensive Eclipse ERP system, connected by Cisco Catalyst® 3750-X Switches with Cisco 2800 and 2900 Series Integrated Services Routers. Using VMware for virtualization and VMware vCenter to manage all of its virtual assets, Van Meter can quickly deploy new applications and move assets to improve performance. On the storage side of the data center, the company uses Cisco MDS 9124 Multilayer Fabric Switches connected to EMC CLARiiON CX4-240 storage.

"Cisco Unified Network Solutions helped to dramatically reduce our data center size from 20 to 30 servers down to 5, while supporting virtualization and simplifying management," says Jason Sinclair, systems engineer at Van Meter, Inc. "Integration between Cisco UCS and VMware enables us to view all of the moving pieces within the network from a single pane of glass and reallocate assets seamlessly to optimize performance and asset utilization."

To run its Cisco Unified Communications Platform, including voice, video, and telecom, Van Meter adopted two Cisco UCS C210 servers and a C200 server in its Cedar Rapids headquarters and a Cisco UCS C210 server in its Cottage Grove office. Cisco solutions enable the company to quickly incorporate its communication platform with data center operations and integrate additional memory to improve scalability as its systems grow.

"Other network solutions rely heavily on high-density memory sticks that are costly and create challenges in meeting minimum system requirements for our ERP and other resource-intensive applications," says Rammelsberg. "With Cisco UCS solutions, we have a lot of space to use relatively inexpensive 4-GB memory sticks, expand memory beyond 100 GB, and get the best performance at the best value." Rammelsberg also notes how Intel Xeon processors available in Cisco UCS servers provide a decisive advantage over other solutions by delivering significant lifts in speed and performance.

Results

Virtualizing and centralizing its data center is paying big dividends for Van Meter. Most notably, since implementing Cisco UCS solutions, Van Meter IT has transformed how the team supports the business. Previously, if a server went down or if a new server needed to be deployed, the department could spend days or even weeks managing the request, depending on the location and type of server needed. Now, with the new virtualized environment built on Cisco UCS and VMware, IT managers can identify issues and remotely reallocate assets and services within minutes, achieving new efficiencies overall.

Because of the accelerated IT processes, the company was able to reallocate staff, shifting some of the focus within IT from managing systems to developing new applications that support business growth and expanding the IT team's set of service offerings. In turn, the company has been able to enhance operations, including inventory management and distribution, as well as communications and customer experiences. "IT is now a much more visible part of the end services we deliver to our customers," says Sinclair. "With the Cisco unified network, we can be much more proactive in creating solutions. We no longer have to focus so much time on network management, and it's a lot easier for us to integrate new applications into the data center."

Not only have services and applications at Van Meter gotten better, but the business is also moving faster. IT managers noted that, since implementing Cisco solutions, application performance has improved, cutting application launch and response times by 50 percent. This newfound speed and the improved integration with an EMC storage area network (SAN) have also accelerated reporting from ERP systems, enabling managers to generate critical inventory and distribution reports in less than an hour, instead of having to wait for reports to run overnight.

The improved scalability, smaller data center footprint, and cost efficiencies of using lower-density memory modules have all contributed to a lower overall cost of ownership, reduced power and cooling costs, and improved sustainability within the data center. "For comparable performance using systems from other vendors, we would have had to use servers with 20 GB of memory and then immediately make an additional $80,000 investment in high-density memory sticks to meet the minimum system requirements," says Sinclair. "On top of that, we were looking at an additional $30,000 in annual maintenance and support costs. Cisco UCS delivers, by far, the best balance between value and performance on the market today."

After the success that the company has experienced using Cisco Unified Network Solutions, Van Meter now uses its own data center to demonstrate to its customers how they could build their own data centers and generate additional value for their businesses. Additionally, Van Meter looks to achieve further value from Cisco unified data center solutions by incorporating them into disaster recovery strategies and its future plans to expand virtualization to desktops.

Product List

Data Center Solutions
· Cisco UCS C200 Servers
· Cisco UCS C210 Servers
· Cisco UCS C250 Servers

Routing and Switching
· Cisco Catalyst 3750-X Switches
· Cisco 2800 and 2900 Series Integrated Services Routers
· Cisco MDS 9124 Multilayer Fabric Switches

Network Management
· VMware vSphere 5 Enterprise

Applications
· Eclipse ERP
· Microsoft Exchange 2007
· Microsoft SQL Server 2008

Storage
· EMC CLARiiON CX4-240

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Computing, visit: www.cisco.com/go/ucs.
To see how Cisco integrates with Microsoft technologies, visit: www.cisco.com/go/microsoft.
To find out more about Cisco Unified Data Center, visit: www.cisco.com/go/unifieddatacenter.

Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

Cisco has more than 200 offices worldwide. Addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco Website at **www.cisco.com/go/offices.**

Intel, the Intel Logo, Intel Core, and Core Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries.