

Data Return

Data Return and Compaq Services—partnering for customer success

“As a leading provider of managed hosting services for the Microsoft Platform, Data Return relies on strategic partners like Compaq Services to address the increasingly sophisticated needs of our customers.”

— David George
Director of Business Development
Data Return Corporation

What makes it work:

- More than 850 *Compaq ProLiant* servers
- System Architecture based on *Compaq Distributed Internet Server Architecture (DISA)*
- *Compaq StorageWorks* Fibre Channel array storage systems
- *Compaq Insight Manager* and *Compaq Remote Server Manager*
- *Compaq Services for Exchange migration*

Business Benefits:

- High availability solutions—tailored for customers’ specific needs
- Scalability—easily handles dramatic traffic peaks and business growth
- Easy management—remote and pre-emptive

When the productivity of your organization is measured by the performance of your messaging infrastructure, availability takes on a new level of importance.

To ensure continuous uptime and availability, an increasing number of companies are turning over system ownership and management to managed hosting service providers. Data Return Corporation of Dallas, Texas has seized the opportunity by focusing on the high end of the market—advanced hosting for applications that utilize Microsoft® BackOffice™ products. Standardized on the Microsoft Windows 2000 operating system and *Compaq ProLiant* server platforms, Data Return delivers high performance, high availability, and cost-effective solutions for medium to large companies.

For Data Return customers, success depends on *Compaq NonStop*[™] eBusiness solutions. Data Return's current infrastructure includes over 850 *Compaq ProLiant* servers, housed in state-of-the-art data centers worldwide and connected to the Internet via multiple backbone providers. Additionally, customers benefit from Data Return's partnership with Compaq Services that ensures a smooth migration to the Microsoft Exchange platform in an advanced hosting environment.

Managing success via scalability

Success means growth, and rapid growth can pose significant challenges on the IT front. When customers first deploy their Web applications, they're usually focused on whether or not their site will be successful. Data Return is focused on helping customers deal with the next phase—how they will manage the success of their site and the ensuing scalability requirements. According to VP of Marketing and Communications Todd Steitle, "With clustered solutions comprised of high-end *Compaq ProLiant* servers and Compaq advanced storage systems, we're able to quickly respond to virtually any transactional load our customers require."

As an example of exponentially growing performance demands, Steitle cites the significant growth of DASH.com — an "infomediary" that provides hundreds of thousands of customers with significant discounts at major online retailers. "With our demanding database system, a key issue for us was a system architecture that could handle both our scalability and performance growth," says George Aguiar, Product Architecture Vice President for DASH.com. "The best choice was working with Data Return to implement the *Compaq ProLiant* 8500 in a clustered environment."

With a growing list of more than 1,000 customers and over 1,600 Web sites worldwide, Data Return addresses its customers' wide range of performance needs through the use of the Compaq Distributed Internet Server Architecture (DISA)—a blueprint for deploying scalable Web applications. Front-ending Data Return's network are Layer 4 switches that load-balance server requests across multiple arrays of application servers. On the back-end, powerful high-end servers, including multi-processor Pentium® III Xeon systems, and *Compaq StorageWorks* RAID array systems drive Microsoft SQL server databases. *Compaq Insight Manager* provides cost-effective server management and control as the company expands to deliver solutions to customers around the globe.

Scalability is a benefit that extends to Microsoft applications such as Exchange Server. "We see no limits to the level of scalability we can offer customers with Compaq and Microsoft solutions," comments Sunny C. Vanderbeck, Data Return chairman and chief executive officer. "We've learned how to scale the *Compaq ProLiant* server platform and Microsoft Windows® 2000 operating system for the highest level of performance and reliability. Our goal is to provide our customers with continuous uptime—and that translates into continuous revenue generation."

The prairie dog effect

As Web sites and messaging applications become more and more critical to business success, downtime is no longer an option. As a result, many companies are moving to clustered messaging architectures and are outsourcing the on-going systems management to managed hosting providers.

An increasing number of customers are asking Data Return to run Microsoft Exchange Server. “Companies are experiencing what we call the ‘prairie dog’ effect,” explains Vanderbeck. “When the mail server stops working, all the heads come up out of the cubes, and all work stops. The productivity loss from a mail server outage used to be relatively inconsequential. Now it’s one of the most visible, mission-critical applications inside a company today.”

Messaging as a market driver

Managing Exchange in a high availability environment is a core competency for Data Return. As a result, David George, director of business development, says messaging and collaboration are huge market drivers for Data Return. “Working together with Compaq Services, we can help these companies roll out their messaging solutions with faster time to market. Our customers benefit from better reliability and availability—with solutions based on Compaq hardware, Microsoft technology, and the Data Return hosted infrastructure.”

Harris says Compaq’s *ActiveAnswers* is a great service delivery tool. “It offers the latest research on new products, including new servers or new TPC numbers, and it allowed me to go through different scenarios and produce cost analysis on different packages as we put together Messaging Center, Data Return’s new Exchange services offering.”

High availability, high flexibility storage

Compaq StorageWorks products are very important to Data Return and its customers, according to Scott Brewer, Data Return vice president of technical services. “We currently leverage the Compaq DISA architecture, using everything from entry-level servers with localized hard drives on up to the dedicated cluster SQL servers sharing array technologies. By standardizing on the *Compaq StorageWorks* product line, Data Return is able to offer a high availability option to customers demanding mission-critical support for their e-commerce sites.”

There is a growing trend to store as much data as possible in the server systems, and the challenge for Data Return is to provide cost effective storage without sacrificing performance. According to Michael Harris of Data Return’s Advanced Technology Deployment Group, “The nice thing about *StorageWorks* is that it gives us an expandable

solution that can grow with the customer's need. We can provide the fastest performance that's available in the external SCSI disk arena, and we can expand to terabytes of storage."

Application hosting soars

As large numbers of companies realize the benefits of outsourcing their Exchange operation, Data Return's application hosting business for messaging is growing rapidly. The typical customer is a mid- to large-size company migrating to Exchange 2000 from an earlier version—or switching to an Exchange solution for the first time.

In Data Return's experience, smaller companies with less than perhaps 100 desktops are slower to understand the value of outsourcing. But by the time they grow to mid-size or larger, they have learned some hard lessons about the costs involved in purchasing, storing, and maintaining servers on a 24x7 basis and acquiring the network and bandwidth necessary for a reliable and scalable application.

24 x 7 x forever

Companies who originally came to Data Return for help with Web infrastructure are now turning to the hosting provider for help with their 24x7xforever business-critical applications that require an infrastructure that is expensive to run and difficult to keep up. "Customers will say 'You did a great job with my complex Web site. Now take my Exchange Server, my SQL Server, my CRM servers, and all of these other applications,' says Vanderbeck. "The problems that we're solving are about availability, scalability and cost of ownership."

Data Return is making large investments in its own infrastructure. As a result, the company offers an unparalleled physical value to its customers. According to George, "One of our goals is to be the top provider in the advanced hosting space for applications based on Microsoft technologies. Our partnership with Compaq Services is helping us get there by combining Compaq's expertise in deploying the world's largest Exchange installations with the most advanced hosting available for Microsoft Exchange."

Partnering for success

Data Return and Compaq are currently working together to provide a turnkey solution relying on Compaq Services for migration and management of Microsoft Exchange platforms in combination with Data Return's hosted infrastructure.

According to George, "Partnering with Compaq has been a good experience and has helped drive our business forward. We use Compaq as our core platform to provide

application services in the marketplace as well as advanced hosting services. We're looking forward to working more closely with Compaq Services in this area.”

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