

Data Return

Data Return and Compaq — partnering for customer success

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 managed hosting solutions for medium to large companies.

Data Return's current infrastructure includes more than 1,200 Compaq *ProLiant* servers, housed in state-of-the-art data centers worldwide and connected to the Internet via multiple backbone providers. And to ensure high availability for Data Return's customers, the firm has teamed with Compaq Services — which provides 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 applications 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."

Mission-critical messaging infrastructure

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, 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 managed infrastructure."

Michael Harris, manager of testing services for Data Return, says *ActiveAnswers*[™] from Compaq 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 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 Harris, "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 operations, 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 24 x 7 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 24 x 7 x forever 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 managed hosting space for applications based on Microsoft technologies. Our partnership with Compaq 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 infrastructure services to ASPs, as well as advanced managed hosting services to Fortune 1000 companies. We’re looking forward to working more closely with Compaq Services in this area.”

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Additional quotes:

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