



Reduce Complexity

Improve Flexibility

Service Catalogue

Enable Automation

IBM and Tectrade help Winterthur Life UK meet storage demands

Challenge

Increase capacity and scalability of mainframe storage; improve performance and flexibility of storage for Microsoft Windows-based systems; simplify storage management and enable faster response to new business requirements.

Solution

Worked with IBM Business Partner Tectrade to implement an IBM TotalStorage DS8100 storage system, with IBM TotalStorage SAN Volume Controller software; Tectrade provided full project management and training services.

Benefits

Ultra-fast, highly scalable storage for both mainframe and Windows environments; all storage capacity is virtualised – including non-IBM hardware – and can be shared across all systems precisely as required.

Winterthur Life UK (www.winterthur-life.co.uk) is one of the UK's top 10 providers of single premium personal pensions, trustee investment plans and corporate pensions, and a leading provider of self-investment retirement plans (Sipps). The company employs around 800 people at two sites in the UK, and distributes its products via top-tier advisers and Employee Benefit Consultants.

As part of a group-wide review of IT service provision, Winterthur Life UK looked at various options for improving the cost-effectiveness of its mainframe-based systems, including hosting them elsewhere in the global business, outsourcing them to a third-party, and refreshing the existing UK infrastructure. Working with IBM, the company chose to implement a new IBM eServer zSeries 890 server, with an IBM TotalStorage DS8100 storage system and IBM TotalStorage SAN Volume Controller software.

Nigel Palmer, Service Delivery Manager for Winterthur Life UK, explains: "We determined that the most cost-effective option was to upgrade our existing infrastructure. By selecting the DS8100 with SAN Volume Controller software, we were able to meet both our mainframe and our Windows storage requirements in a single solution. The benefits, in terms of simplification, performance, flexibility and ease of management, are enormous."

Uniting systems

Winterthur Life UK's mainframe environment runs core insurance systems, including its closed-book operations – managing life and pensions products that are no longer sold to new customers. The company also sells to high-net-worth individuals, where the emphasis is on highly tailored insurance products. These are managed using in-house software running under Microsoft Windows.

"The virtualised storage environment from IBM is substantially more cost-effective than our previous environment, and it gives us many more capabilities into the bargain."

Nigel Palmer, Service Delivery Manager for Winterthur Life UK

Infrastructure Objectives

Storage Consolidation

- Centralised Storage
- Enterprise Disk
- Storage Virtualisation

Key Deliverables

- Ultra-fast, highly scalable storage
- Shared storage across all systems
- Advanced copy services and reduced backup times

With a demanding customer-base that expects the highest standards in service, it is crucial for Winterthur Life UK to have robust, highly available systems. The upgrade to the mainframe environment presented an excellent opportunity to boost the resilience of the Windows-based systems, as Nigel Palmer explains:

“We had rapidly growing storage requirements for Windows, and we wanted to provide all the storage in one place. The combination of DS8100 and SAN Volume Controller gave us that ability, and brought our Windows storage to a new level of reliability.”

Plug-and-play deployment

IBM designed the overall architecture of the solution, and took the project management lead. The direct implementation work was carried out by IBM Business Partner Tectrade (www.tectrade.co.uk), who also provided training and support services.

“Tectrade impressed us right from the outset with their professionalism and technical competence,” says Palmer. “During our first meeting, they logged in remotely to a demonstration SAN Volume Controller site, showing us how it was controlling a mixture of mainframe and open systems storage. That gave us great confidence that they could actually deliver what we needed.”

Sitting at the heart of Winterthur Life UK’s SAN, the DS8100 storage system offers high-performance, high-availability storage. Prior to its deployment, the organisation had been approaching the limits of the backup window for its mainframe systems, and there was a risk that the backup would begin to extend into normal working hours. The new solution – the DS8100 combined with the IBM FlashCopy software on SAN Volume Controller – immediately knocked two hours off the backup run, giving Winterthur Life UK plenty of room for manoeuvre.

The DS8100 server at Winterthur Life UK is split into separate mainframe and Windows partitions – and SAN Volume Controller is used to virtualise and manage the storage volumes used by the Windows systems.

Says Palmer, “The implementation of the DS8100 ran exceptionally smoothly – we practically just plugged the new systems in, and they were ready to use. The speed of deployment was in part due to Tectrade’s expert guidance.”

Drag-and-drop flexibility

SAN Volume Controller enables Winterthur Life UK to manage its non-IBM storage in exactly the same way as it manages capacity on its DS8100 and DS4100 systems – and to treat all the available capacity on disparate systems as a single homogeneous resource.

The value of storage virtualisation was immediately apparent. Winterthur Life UK needed to upgrade the firmware on several HP storage servers, and was

able to use SAN Volume Controller to move the data they held in-flight to the DS8100 server, without live users even noticing. “SAN Volume Controller is a brilliant solution in terms of its flexibility and ease of management,” says Palmer. “It allows us to add or re-allocate storage exactly as required, and it’s almost as simple as dragging-and-dropping between different systems.”

He adds, “The large cache on the SAN Volume Controller has provided a dramatic increase in storage performance for our Windows servers, enabling much faster response times. We have since added around 25 servers to the SAN, with no negative impact on performance.”

Rapid response, cost-effective storage

The move from a per-server model for storage to a centralised, virtualised architecture has simplified storage management and enables improved utilisation of the available capacity. Instead of running out of capacity on individual machines, while spare capacity remains locked away elsewhere on the network, Winterthur Life UK can re-allocate storage as required from the central pool – giving each server exactly what it needs, with no wastage.

Says Palmer, “SAN Volume Controller enables us to provision new storage very rapidly. In the type of market that we (IT) support, with highly flexible financial products coupled to the demand for an increasingly shortened time-to-market, we are accustomed to getting last-minute requests from business users. Now, we’re actually able to meet those requirements.”

He adds, “The virtualised storage environment from IBM is substantially more cost-effective than our previous environment, and it gives us many more capabilities into the bargain.”

The new IBM storage solution enables the management of distinct tiers of storage, ready for the demands of information lifecycle management. Winterthur Life UK will be able to move archived or low-value data to lower-cost disk, freeing up high-performance drives for production data.

Prepared for the life to come

Palmer concludes, “Our IBM storage virtualisation solution was the first step towards a full service-oriented architecture, a process which is now continuing with the virtualization of servers. Looking to the future, we expect to be able to have a pool of virtualised IT resources that can be combined in whatever way best fits the business requirements.”

Vendor Alliances on this project

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