

Reference story: Corporate Express

A smooth transition to major server savings

Highlights

Here are just some of the things that Andy Miller and his team at Corporate Express achieved in just over six months:

- ⊗ Evaluated all UNIX servers from the major vendors and chose IBM p5 to replace Sun
- ⊗ Installed seven p5 model 570 servers and transferred:
 - ⊗ An ERP application with 3,500 concurrent users
 - ⊗ An eCommerce application with 8,000 to 9,000 concurrent users
- ⊗ Slashed costs for servers, space and power for a 40% reduction in total cost of ownership
- ⊗ Provided lots of additional server capacity for growth

This is definitely a story worth looking at more carefully.

Paragon's role

Andy is quick to distinguish Paragon from the crowd. *"Frankly we expect the vendors' VARs to be interested only in the sale. Paragon is very different. They brought a strong, effective technical team to the project that matched the excellence of our in-house experts."*

Background

Corporate Express supplies businesses with office and computer products - a business that yielded \$4.5 billion in US sales in 2004. Following an open-systems strategy their IT department have developed very successful systems in house including:

- ⊗ Invision: An ERP system with 3,500 concurrent users
- ⊗ E-Way: A direct interface to their customers that regularly supports 8,000 to 9,000 concurrent users

The challenges

Corporate Express regularly reviews their server technology to ensure that they have:

- ⊗ The best available price-performance
- ⊗ The most reliable and available platforms
- ⊗ Significant short-term growth and the ability to scale up massively in the long term
- ⊗ In summary, the lowest total cost of ownership

The project

In late 2004 the team set out to benchmark the servers offered by all of the leading vendors. As the in-house development of their applications suggests, Corporate Express has a very self-sufficient IT operation. So, their approach was to install test servers in their own IT lab' and perform detailed benchmarks with real load tests. When they last did this in 1999 it resulted in the selection of the Sun servers that were still in use. Naturally, IBM was invited to submit servers for the test. Because he had previously worked with Haydn Hirstine (Paragon's President), Andy was pleased when Paragon was called in as the IBM Business Partner to assist in selecting and installing the appropriate test equipment.



When Paragon installed the rack-mounted IBM p5 for the test it immediately impressed the benchmark team. Once the full results were in the selection was clear. Seven p5 model 570s were ordered.

Paragon supplied and installed the hardware and the AIX operating system. Andy's team took over to transfer the applications and, just three months after making the decision, Corporate Express had a new server platform that will enable growth for many years. The change is dramatic in many ways, but the most obvious is visual; the diminutive p5 rack looks lost in the sea of space freed up by removing the old Sun servers.

The future

Dynamic logical partitioning is already in use on the p5s. Corporate Express is now looking at further exploiting the advanced virtualization capabilities of the new platform to achieve more simplification and efficiency.

Paragon partnership

Andy is very clear that, as a singularly competent and self-sufficient team, Corporate Express has learned to have low expectations of the value of resellers and similar organizations. However in his own words he is equally clear that Paragon is the exception *"There is a big difference. Paragon has a strong engineering team. They matched the outstandingly high technical standards set by our in-house team. That's how they earned our respect and that's why I would recommend them to others."*