



With Virtual Infrastructure, Willis Group Makes Real Savings of Over £200,000

VMware ESX Server, VMotion, VirtualCenter and Virtual SMP Enable Server Consolidation and Streamlined Management

RESULTS

- Hardware cost savings of over £200,000
- Server consolidation ratio of 20 to one
- Space, power and network infrastructure savings
- Deployment of new servers now seven times faster
- Application testing accelerated
- High availability and improved support for 14,500 users
- Ability to move virtual machines between physical servers without any downtime
- Simplified server farm management

Willis Group solves warranty issue using VMware ESX Server

Willis Group is one of the world's largest professional services firms specialising in risk management. With over 300 offices in more than 100 countries, its global team of 14,500 associates provides a wide range of strategic and operational risk management services.

The Information Services (IS) division at Willis Group is responsible for providing robust production systems to support its global user base, as well as training end users and developing new applications. It maintains 400 servers in the main UK data centre, the same in the US, and another 200 servers around the rest of the world.

One of the key issues facing Willis was that a number of its servers were approaching the end of their warranties and to replace them would have required a huge hardware investment. Other significant challenges facing the IS division included:

- Space restrictions on server farm expansion due to many machines operating at below optimum capacity
- Desire to expand training, development and maintenance environments but limited available budgets
- Too much time required for server administration
- Spiralling power, cooling and network infrastructure costs

Andy MacLachlan, senior technical specialist at Willis Group, along with the project team, was tasked to find a solution to address the immediate warranty issue that would also allow Willis to implement a future-proof infrastructure and reduce administration time.

VMware ESX Server enables 20 to one server consolidation

The team decided that the only way to avoid replacing every legacy server like-for-like would be to initiate a virtualisation strategy. After assessing a number of products based on performance and track record, they chose the only product that fully met all of Willis Group's requirements: VMware® ESX Server™.

The project team initially rolled out ESX Server to replace 40 legacy servers with just two. A further project included the expansion of the company's training environment, which needed 12 extra machines. Using ESX Server, Willis Group reduced the number of physical machines required from 12 to four. Lastly, they virtualised the test lab environment, avoiding the need to purchase 30 extra machines that would have cost £105,000.

“Not only did we manage to solve our initial issue of replacing out-of-date machines but also made cost savings of at least £70,000 by consolidating 40 legacy systems to two high performance servers. In addition, the savings made by virtualising our training environment and test lab means we have saved over £200,000 just on hardware by using VMware.”

*Andy MacLachlan
Senior Technical Specialist, Willis Group*



VMWARE VIRTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT WORK

- VMware products: ESX Server, Virtual SMP, VMotion, VirtualCenter
- Two HP Proliant DL 580s host 40 virtual machines
- 14 HP Proliant DL 380s host 52 virtual machines
- Microsoft® Windows® NT4, 2000 and 2003 server guest operating systems
- Applications include: Sun Accounts, Filenet, Lotus Notes, MS Exchange, IIS & DotNet Framework, Ricoh scanning engine, Forte

Benefits of Willis Group's virtual infrastructure strategy include:

- **Hardware cost savings.** Willis Group has saved over £200,000 by limiting the number of new physical machines in its training, maintenance and test environments.
- **Streamlined management & high availability.** VMotion and VirtualCenter streamline the support and administration of Willis Group's data centre as well as offering higher availability for users worldwide.
- **State-of-the-art training environment.** The expansion of Willis Group's training environment means that more users can be trained faster, at a lower cost.
- **Rapid deployment of new applications.** Applications can be tested and delivered to end users far more quickly than previously, giving associates a valuable competitive advantage.

Realising the benefits of a virtual infrastructure

The team have based the company's consolidated virtual infrastructure on HP DL580, 4-way, 2GHz servers running ESX Server with VMotion™ and VirtualCenter™. VMotion enables the IS division to move running virtual machines between physical machines without any server downtime or impact to the end user.

"The management capabilities of VMotion and VirtualCenter mean that the time spent moving machines is reduced by several hours. They are very easy to use which allows less skilled staff to carry out operations previously performed by a few specialist staff. This enables us to be more cost-effective and flexible and our US colleagues can carry out critical server maintenance remotely to provide a round the clock service," explained MacLachlan.

The IS department can test new applications dramatically faster and more easily now that developers can take test systems back to a previous state in just five minutes. Before they would have spent an entire day rebuilding a system after each test.

Virtual SMP enables Willis Group to maximise the performance and availability of applications running in a virtual environment. With Virtual SMP, a single virtual machine can span multiple physical processors to share the workload of resource-intensive applications.

Following the success of the UK project, Willis Group plans to consolidate its US data centre in Nashville. This is anticipated to reap hardware cost savings of £70,000 over six months.

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VMware, Inc. 3145 Porter Drive, Bldg F, Palo Alto, CA 94304 USA
Tel 650-475-5000 Fax 650-475-5001