JM Family Enterprises, Inc.

"With a single click … we give reports on which machines are patched and which ones are vulnerable."

— Tom Holmes
Vice President
Technology Operations

Automotive Leader JM Family Fuels Operational, Patching Success with VMware vCenter Configuration Manager

JM Family Enterprises Inc., headquartered in Deerfield Beach, Florida, is a recognized leader in the automotive industry.

Founded in 1968, JM Family grew from a core distribution business to a diversified automotive corporation focused on vehicle distribution and processing, finance and warranty services, insurance activities, retail sales, and technology products and services.

Considered a leader by industry experts, JM Family repeatedly appears on industry "top performers" lists. The company is ranked by Forbes as the 17th largest privately held company in the United States and is also ninth on the InformationWeek 500 listing of the nation's leading information technology innovators. InformationWeek additionally cites JM Family as the highest ranking Florida company. For eight consecutive years, the company has enjoyed popular support, placing on FORTUNE's list of "100 Best Companies to Work For."

The Challenge

Service Center Operations Slowed by Constant Patching

JM Family needed a reliable method for assessing, deploying and verifying patches to its 400+ server network. The company also found it difficult to accurately assess software usage and resources utilized by its business units, which impacted overall operational efficiency. Further driving the need for more efficient patching, JM Family had recently adopted a patching priority based on Microsoft criticality classifications, which specify that critical and high-priority patches are to be addressed immediately.

"Whenever we had to patch something, it was like putting out a fire," said Tom Holmes, vice president of technology operations. "We would drop everything to work on patching and it would take us weeks to get all the servers patched."

The Solution

Powerful Patching Engine Allows Efficient Reporting for Enterprise

Patch management was the driver for purchasing VMware vCenter™ Configuration Manager and the add-on module "We rely on Configuration Manager to handle patching for us. We schedule the patches at night and let them go," Holmes said.

With the updating module, enterprise patching efforts were reduced from weeks to two days. "With Configuration Manager, we schedule the patch deployments and reboots after hours. The first night through, we got 80 percent without failure. The next day we came back and fixed those machines that did not patch, made necessary configuration changes from the centralized Configuration Manager console, and rescheduled the deployment for the remaining 20 percent."

vCenter Configuration Manager provides JM Family with the intelligence about its machines to make patching efficient and effective. Configuration Manager includes a configuration management repository that notifies the administrators first and foremost of systems that require patching. It also provides details about systems needing upgrades, prerequisite patches, service packs, and so forth, to ensure a high level of enterprise patch success.

Configuration Manager also eases reporting to management. Administrators run Configuration Manager reports to inform management daily on system patching status. "They are really happy with the reports on the state of the enterprise," Holmes said. "With a single click, we give them daily reports on which machines are patched, which ones are left, which ones are vulnerable, and which ones do not have affected applications installed so they don't pose vulnerabilities."

Establishing a Baseline to Project, Win
Operating in a chargeback department often involves interpretation and guesswork. Configuration Manager gave JM Family the ability to accurately report how many processors are in use. While they weren't surprised to learn the exact number of servers in the enterprise, JM Family was happy to have the reports to back up its projections.

"We probably knew that we had that many servers, but it was an eye-opener to have the reports based on those numbers," Holmes said.

Holmes' team manages around 450 servers, both Windows and UNIX. While the server discovery hasn't increased the department's operating budget, it provided a baseline to move forward. Holmes adds, "We had a number for our budget, and what we discovered with vCenter Configuration Manager did not change that. In the end, our business units' costs stay the same but we are giving them more services. We are doing a lot more with the same amount of money. It's good, however, to have an accurate view into that world."

JM Family is forming a technology group responsible for enterprise tools to monitor the company's cross-platform network from a single source, with Configuration Manager at the center of this new program. The group is responsible for systems management, provisioning and tracking network nodes and other tasks.

JM Family Technical Planning and Information Security groups also use Configuration Manager for a multitude of administrative tasks. "It's hard to use all the functionality of a product, but with vCenter Configuration Manager, we use it to a full extent," Holmes said.

What's Ahead for Configuration Manager at JM Family
JM Family used Configuration Manager recently to true-up its Microsoft licensing. With Configuration Manager, the company knows which applications are running on which boxes. Not only can they report vulnerabilities this way, but they are able to use it to assess their software use accurately.

Next, JM Family plans to use the tool for more compliance activities. Currently, auditors receive reports on vulnerability status to meet regulatory requirements. In the future, the company indicates it will be able to use Configuration Manager to build its own compliance templates based on the golden image auditors want.

With the improvements already made to operational efficiency with patch management, JM Family is secure knowing its enterprise intimately. It has visibility into what it is managing, and best of all, the company is assured it is providing an excellent work environment for employees.

To learn more about JM Family, visit www.jmfamily.com.

About JM Family Enterprises Inc.

JM Family Enterprises Inc. (JMFE) (www.jmfamily.com) is a $9.4 billion diversified automotive company ranked by Forbes as the 17th largest privately held company in the United States. For eight consecutive years, the company has ranked on the FORTUNE "100 Best Companies to Work For" list and is No. 9 on the InformationWeek 500 listing of the nation's leading-information technology innovators.

The company's primary subsidiaries and divisions include Southeast Toyota Distributors, LLC (SET), the nation's largest franchised distributor of Toyota vehicles; World Omni Financial Corp., a diversified financial services company; JM&A Group, one of the largest independent insurance and extended warranty groups of companies in the United States; JM Service Center, the company's internal shared services center; JM Lexus, the largest volume retail Lexus dealership in the world; and JMsolutions, a dealer-focused technology products and services division. Headquartered in Deerfield Beach, Florida, JMFE has major operations in Jacksonville, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; Commerce and Alpharetta, Georgia; and St. Louis, Missouri.