



Northrim Bank

VMware Horizon View Provides High-Availability, Low-Cost Desktop Virtualization Solution for Mobile and Branch-Office Bank Employees and Customers

INDUSTRY

Financial services

REGION:

Americas

SIZE

Northrim Bank is an Alaska-based community bank with 14 branches in Anchorage, the Matanuska Valley, and Fairbanks serving 70 percent of Alaska's population.

ABOUT THE BUSINESS

Northrim Bank, headquartered in Anchorage, Alaska, is committed to providing Customer First Service. Its approximately 250 employees specialize in serving more than 100,000 customers—businesses, professionals, and individual Alaskans who are looking for personal service and value.

PRODUCTS

- VMware® Horizon View™
- VMware vSphere®
- VMware vCloud® Suite

Snapshot

Northrim Bank believes that customers deserve the very highest level of service. VMware Horizon View is helping the bank meet its “Customer First Service” goals by enabling workforce mobility between headquarters and branch offices, and serving as a critical component of the bank’s “branch in a box” high-availability solution. Horizon View—together with Cisco UCS E-Series Servers and Atlantis Computing ILIO data-storage technologies—reduces costs, keeps the bank in compliance, and enables always-on access to applications for business-critical processes performed by management, bank tellers, and loan originators.

Business Challenges

- Support mobile employees moving between locations
- Easily integrate with existing business-critical systems (e.g., teller and loan-processing systems)
- Provide a robust solution in space-constrained branch locations
- Maintain security and compliance

Solution

The lean IT staff at Northrim Bank uses Horizon View to enable mobile employees to access all of the data they need from any device, any time. The solution supports the bank's mobility and security initiatives, helping to keep Northrim in compliance with stringent industry regulations. With the innovative “branch in a box” solution using Horizon View and Cisco UCS E-Series Servers, Northrim IT delivers nonstop access to business-critical applications and data to all employees all the time.

Benefits

- High availability for business-critical applications
- Less time spent provisioning, enabling IT to focus on innovation
- Lower costs
- Local disaster recovery

Use Cases

- Secure workforce mobility and bring your own device (BYOD)
- Remote-office access/branch-office access
- Centralized, high-availability desktops

“With Horizon View, provisioning desktops, which used to be a very difficult, very manual task has become automated and it’s easy for us to deploy not just one or two, but 10 or 20 desktops within a few minutes. With the ability to have different snapshots, different versions and different gold images, we can tailor the user desktop to the business need.”

Erick Stoeckle
Network and Systems Manager
Northrim Bank

Situation

Elated customers. That’s what Northrim Bank hopes to gain from its Customer First Service policy. The bank’s approximately 250 employees sign a personal pledge to uphold Northrim’s standards of service, going above and beyond to ensure that customers are not just satisfied, but that they are elated with their Alaska-based bank.

IT is no exception. The bank’s lean IT network and systems infrastructure staff must make systems highly available and redundant on a 24/7 basis for all internal and external customers. Staff must be able to get to work fast, feel comfortable, and service the bank’s more than 100,000 customers to meet the Customer First Service guarantee. Yet providing solutions for an increasingly mobile staff bringing their own devices to work—and moving between headquarters and the bank’s 14 branch offices—was proving to be difficult over slow WAN connections and fragmented infrastructure.

The Northrim IT team was frustrated by its legacy systems frequently crashing and experiencing hardware problems. “We were dealing with bare metal and we would get many calls in the middle of the night,” explains Erick Stoeckle, network and systems manager for Northrim Bank. “That prompted us to look at VMware solutions for the desktop because we needed automation and we wanted to provide high availability at a lower cost on commodity hardware.”

The Northrim IT team began an evaluation of virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) solutions, including Horizon View which simplifies desktop management and provides users with what they need, when they need it. After benchmarking Horizon View against competitors including Citrix XenApp and Microsoft with the built-in Hyper-V solution, the team determined that “overall the most stability and functionality came out of VMware,” says Stoeckle.

The IT team’s familiarity and success with VMware vCloud® in the data center also contributed to its decision to deploy Horizon View.

“VMware software solved a lot of our problems,” Stoeckle recalls. “We were able to have a higher workload on fewer resources, so it saved the bank money and made our customers happy. Using VMware® ESXi™ and vCloud Suite, we were able to reduce our overall infrastructure costs by 40 percent.”

Solution

Experience with vCloud Suite and the introduction of Cisco UCS E-Series Servers gave the Northrim IT team confidence that it could consolidate servers and resources into a footprint that it could co-locate off the primary campus. According to Stoeckle, “That’s how VDI started here—with our existing infrastructure in the data center. We came up with this concept of a ‘branch in a box,’ which was getting the smallest footprint and the most capacity so we could move VDI instances out to each one of our 14 branches, if necessary.”

The IT team virtualized workloads that processed core systems for mobile workers moving between branches, then—seeing that solutions were growing—started looking at ways to expand.

“The Cisco UCS E-Series Servers allow us to put a hypervisor and a blade server into our routers at our branch locations, which enables us to deliver the portability and mobility that our users need,” Stoeckle says.

Additionally, Northrim IT uses Horizon View data protection to back up VDI instances and keep a copy in the data center for local disaster recovery. Stoeckle says, “That way if there is a complete disaster in a branch, tellers and other staff can just move to the next branch—a few blocks away in Anchorage—and still do their jobs. Our customers can still be serviced. Loans can be processed and customers stay happy.”

“Now we’re looking at ways that we can provide better service and make our internal, as well as our external customer more profitable. We’re able to focus IT resources. Instead of being an expense, we’re starting to become a profit center and help drive business—whether it’s new applications, new solutions, or new workflows—we want to further automate and reduce latencies for customers internally and externally.”

Erick Stoeckle
Network and Systems Manager
Northrim Bank

According to Stoeckle, BYOD “is big at Northrim.” In support of its ever-increasing mobile employee population, “IT staff use Horizon View to provide a virtual session on those mobile devices as if they were in the office,” he says. Segmenting personal devices from the corporate and business data on them is critical to meeting regulatory compliance requirements. With Horizon View, all of the data is encrypted, and the data remains secure because it resides only in the data center—never on the mobile device. If a device is lost or stolen, IT can use Horizon View to deliver the exact same experience, and employees are quickly back to work.

The growing number of mobile users, combined with limited branch-office space, also led Northrim IT to investigate storage options to eliminate I/O bottlenecks. “The Atlantis Solution allows us to create virtual RAM drives out of datastores—to run in-memory on local hosts. There’s no other, faster I/O into a host. In addition, it deduplicates, consolidates, and compresses images to actual storage area networks (SANs),” explains Stoeckle.

In contrast to a CPU-bound, disk-drive solution that might serve 10 concurrent users at a branch, the Atlantis Computing ILIO data-storage solution enables Northrim Bank to support more than 30 users at each location using the “branch in a box” solution while significantly reducing latency time. Because the “branch in a box” solution caches objects, the IT team can “deploy and provision at a very rapid pace,” Stoeckle says. This provides mobile and branch-office staff with the data and applications they need to do their jobs and gives the Northrim IT staff a chance to transition the IT role from reactive to proactive—spending more time working on new services and improving existing ones.

Benefits

Within a few minutes, Northrim IT can now deploy 10 or 20 desktops to a remote branch, rather than just 1 or 2. The automated provisioning process based on the Horizon View, Atlantis, and Cisco solutions supports different versions of desktops tailored to a user’s business needs—from executives to tellers to loan officers. This is particularly helpful in reducing the time it takes to on-board new employees.

“When you have your infrastructure in order and things are running very smoothly, like they are now, we can actually turn IT away from what used to be fire fighting almost every day to finding ways to improve services,” Stoeckle says.

One of the services that Northrim expects to enhance is disaster recovery. When disaster did strike some months ago—in the form of one bank branch going offline because of a down power line and the generator for that branch being unable to start because of a water-main break at the same time—Horizon View was able to provide employees who needed access to their workstations with their critical information. Loan originators, for example, were able to go to a branch a few blocks away in Anchorage to easily log in to their virtual session and have the same experience as at their primary business location. By adding VMware® vCenter™ Site Recovery Manager™ to the existing solution in the future, Stoeckle expects that his team can provide an even more robust business-continuity solution.

As a financial institution, Northrim must meet existing industry regulations and be prepared to support even more. “One of the great things about Horizon View is that we’re able to impress our auditors with the amount of security and infrastructure that’s around the solution,” says Stoeckle. “We’re able to show them how things can be co-hosted but still segmented and secured from each other. With Horizon View, we can have redundancy from one data center to another from one branch to another—and that plays very well into compliance and meeting regulations.”

Business continuity is difficult for many financial institutions to achieve, but Northrim is achieving it with a robust solution serving internal employees and external customers, built around Horizon View.

About VMware Horizon Suite

VMware® Horizon™ Suite, the platform for workforce mobility, connects end users to their data and applications on any device without compromising IT security and control. The suite includes the following products::

VMware Horizon View

Simplify desktop management, security, and control while delivering an optimum end-user computing experience across all devices and networks.

VMware® Horizon Mirage™

Gain centralized, zero-touch physical and virtual desktop image management with native performance and flexibility for end users.

VMware® Horizon Workspace™

Streamline the end-user experience and reduce costs with a single workspace for applications and data, delivered securely on any device.

VMware® vCenter™ Operations Manager for Horizon View™

Monitor and optimize the health, performance, and efficiency of your entire VDI.

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