PEIRCE COLLEGE DELIVERS RELIABLE ONLINE CLASSES WITH VMWARE VCLOUD AIR SOLUTION

INDUSTRY
EDUCATION

LOCATION
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

KEY CHALLENGES
- Reduce the high cost and hands-on time spent on colocation services.
- Increase data-transfer rates and eliminate constant box reboots.
- Ensure disaster recovery and business continuity.

SOLUTION
Peirce College implemented VMware vCloud Air Virtual Private Cloud for its data center and VMware vCloud Air Disaster Recovery to ensure resilience. The college was able to access unlimited resources for a predicable fixed price.

BUSINESS BENEFITS
- Reduced costs by 37 percent in a year
- Increased data transfer from 2GB an hour to 300GB an hour, making robust data backup and recovery easy
- Accessed knowledgeable experts in under an hour for fast issue resolution

Peirce College is a leader in online education, and it offers nationally ranked online bachelor's degree programs. As it expanded its online classes, Peirce needed a stronger technology infrastructure. Its previous colocation facility was expensive and prone to crashes, and its data-transfer rate was limited to 2GB an hour. When Peirce implemented VMware vCloud® Air™ Virtual Private Cloud for its data center, it increased data speed, cut costs, and achieved rock-solid reliability in the cloud.

Peirce College provides practical, career-focused education for working adults through high-quality and affordable classes. Founded in Philadelphia in 1865, Peirce was one of the first accredited colleges in the United States to offer complete online degree programs. U.S. News & World Report has repeatedly named the college's online bachelor's degree programs among the nation's best.

The Challenge

Offering high-quality online courses requires a dependable IT infrastructure. But Peirce College realized its approach to IT was no longer making the grade. "We were housing our data center in a very small colocation space in New Jersey," says Michael Mozeliak, Peirce's director of IT. "It was essentially a gym locker. And it was massively expensive."

The colocation center allowed Peirce to do more with less IT staff, but it had several drawbacks. For instance, the data transfer rate between the New Jersey site and Peirce's Philadelphia campus was slow. The lack of throughput prevented active replication, and it took all night to do a single backup.

Moreover, glitches forced Mozeliak to go to New Jersey at least once a month to reboot boxes before starting his day in Philadelphia. Frustrated, Peirce College finally decided to exit the New Jersey space and move its infrastructure back in-house. But as online enrollment continued to grow, the burden on the IT staff increased in terms of minimizing downtime and ensuring the data center was fully operational.

Another IT concern was disaster recovery and business continuity. When Superstorm Sandy hit the Atlantic coast in 2012, it became clear that further protections were needed. Mozeliak knew Peirce's Philadelphia facility could just as easily be taken down by future storms. It made him rethink his own business continuity requirements and the need for a new approach.

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MICHAEL MOZELIAK,
DIRECTOR OF IT,
PEIRCE COLLEGE

VMWARE FOOTPRINT
• VMware vSphere
• VMware vCloud Air
  Virtual Private Cloud
• VMware vCloud Air
  Disaster Recovery

APPLICATIONS VIRTUALIZED
• Active Directory
• SQL

PLATFORM
• HP servers
• NetApp storage

"My boss asked me, 'If you were a startup, how would you build your IT infrastructure?'" Mozeliak recalls. "I laughed and told him I wouldn't. I'd build everything in the cloud and have no onsite data centers because it's cheaper and better that way."

Solution

Like most colleges, Peirce operates on a budget, so predictable pricing was an important factor in Mozeliak's search for a cloud solution. His team considered offerings from Rackspace, Amazon, and Google but couldn't find the right price point or cost structure.

"But with VMware vCloud Air, we can pay a fixed amount for a complete set of resources," he says. "VMware just opens the floodgates and lets you use what you need. Plus, because we were familiar with VMware, it was an easy transition."

Peirce College had already deployed VMware vSphere® server virtualization several years prior and was running a full VMware environment; so it was a simple step for the college to implement vCloud Air Virtual Private Cloud for its data center and VMware vCloud Air Disaster Recovery for business continuity. The IT department quickly established connections from the vSphere platform to vCloud Air Virtual Private Cloud with drag-and-drop templates; and it now manages the entire Peirce infrastructure from a single user interface. Securing student data is crucial to an educational institution; and with this technology, Peirce College knows where its data is at all times.

Setting up vCloud Air Disaster Recovery was only a matter of a few clicks. It's inexpensive and offers user-friendly disaster-recovery capabilities, with the vCloud Air console enabling 24/7 access to the recovery environment.

Overall, "moving to VMware was a no-brainer," Mozeliak says. "I don't have to deal with a vendor I don't trust. I know VMware works and works well. Everything has been rock-solid and easy to manage."

Benefits

For Peirce College, the benefits of the vCloud Air solution begin with peace of mind. Mozeliak knows he now has data center redundancy and business continuity from running in the cloud. Students can rely on Peirce's technology services and can access online classes without any glitches or interruptions.

When issues do arise, they don't take long to fix. Mozeliak can count on having a live person on the line at VMware within an hour. "It's amazing how knowledgeable the support people are and how quickly they get issues resolved," he says. Ultimately, that means less downtime and quicker issue resolution for Peirce College. Additionally, Mozeliak has more time to work on more strategic initiatives.

As for operating expenses, VMware is saving Peirce College a significant amount of money by eliminating the costs of colocation, hardware, maintenance, and outside support. Peirce now spends about 37 percent less each year on support and services for vCloud Air Virtual Private Cloud and vCloud Air Disaster Recovery. That's compared to what it previously spent on its colocation site alone, which offered far fewer resources and support. With the reduced cost of the vCloud Air solution comes a big increase in speed. In the past, the fastest Peirce could transfer data was 2GB an hour. With the VMware solution, the IT environment is no longer throttled and can easily push 300GB in a matter of hours.

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"We're not a large school and we don't have a big budget," Mozeliak says. "So to be able to do great things with little money, that keeps me very happy as an IT professional. And it keeps the college happy to know we're in the best hands, with strong product offerings from VMware."

Looking Ahead

Mozeliak plans to continue growing Peirce College's infrastructure in the VMware cloud rather than on-premises. Underpinning this wholesale transition to the cloud is the VMware solution. "Everything is going to the cloud; it's just a matter of time," Mozeliak says. "VMware makes it very easy and painless; everything works flawlessly. I have no fear, thanks to my confidence in VMware."

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