

Manitoba Blue Cross



“VMware Site Recovery Manager has turned disaster recovery from a manual process into a push-button operation. It’s hard to put a price tag on that kind of simplification.”

— Bill Fleury,
Systems Administrator, Manitoba Blue Cross

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Challenge

IT systems require higher degree of failover protection.

Solution

VMware vSphere creates a flexible, portable virtual infrastructure that increases availability, while VMware vCenter Site Recovery Manager automates disaster recovery processes.

VMware at Work

- VMware vSphere™ 4 featuring:
 - VMware ESX® 4
 - VMware vMotion™
 - VMware Distributed Resource Scheduler (DRS)
 - VMware Fault Tolerance (FT)
 - VMware High Availability (HA)
 - VMware vStorage Thin Provisioning
- VMware vCenter™ Server 4 Standard
- VMware vCenter Site Recovery Manager

Deployment environment

- Hardware: HP ProLiant BL490c blade servers with HP EVA-4400 storage array
- Guest operating systems: Windows 2003, SUSE Linux
- Virtualized production applications: homegrown claims applications, payroll system, Service Desk Express helpdesk ticketing system, web servers, Domino, Novell Zenworks, Blackberry Enterprise Server.

Manitoba Blue Cross (MBC) is a not-for-profit organization operated by Manitobans for Manitobans offering essential services within the supplementary health care and travel benefit fields. The Technical Services staff of 12 people—out of a total of 250 employees—is responsible for providing the “guts” that keep MBC operating on a daily basis: everything from payroll to the company website.

To help ensure a high degree of availability and recoverability for these IT systems, MBC made an investment in state-of-the-art hardware and VMware solutions. The company used VMware vSphere to virtualize its server environment, and then purchased two EVA-4400 storage arrays to replicate virtual machines from site to site. To round out the solution, MBC purchased VMware vCenter Site Recovery Manager. “We have it configured to failover our entire virtual machine environment at the push of a button,” says Bill Fleury, systems administrator at MBC.

The company had looked at other disaster recovery automation solutions, but didn’t find any as robust as the VMware offering. “PlateSpin had something similar to Site Recovery Manager but it wasn’t quite as seamless,” says Fleury. “and overall, it just wasn’t that impressive.”

MBC has five VMware ESX hypervisors in its production environment, and two ESX hypervisors at its disaster site that are ready for failover. “We don’t have to build replacement machines for anything that’s in our virtual environment,” says Fleury. “With Site Recovery Manager, we just push a button, and they come up; it’s great!”

Results

- Reduce Recovery Time Objective (RTO) significantly. “Site Recovery Manager really drops our RTO since everything is replicated right up to the second and then failed over,” says Fleury.
- Simplify disaster recovery testing. “With Site Recovery Manager we can do a test failover—rather than an actual real failover, which is what we had to do in the past—to prove how long it will take for a virtual machine to come up,” says Fleury. “We can leave our production systems in place but still get a report that we can print out and give to the auditors or management.
- Improve server availability and performance. “We have features like VMware HA and VMware DRS turned on in our production site,” says Fleury. “We see DRS kicking into gear all the time, balancing out the load between the servers so that we get the best possible performance.”
- Reduce storage needs by 25 percent. “Using the VMware vStorage Thin Provisioning feature, we’ve been able to save quite a bit of disk space,” says Fleury. “I’m estimating we’ll be able to get 25 percent of our storage back.”

