HolidayCheck

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HolidayCheck Sends Travelers on Vacation even Faster and more Relaxed – Thanks to VMware Virtual SAN Solution

HolidayCheck empowers travelers to find the best flights, hotels, vacation rentals, and cars for their holiday needs. Through ratings and comments, the company enables vacationers to browse among 10 million reviews and select from over 300,000 hotels. Launched in 1999, HolidayCheck today handles approximately 20 to 30 million visits monthly, placing tremendous demands on the IT infrastructure. With VMware Virtual SAN™, HolidayCheck is helping travelers arrive at their destinations as enjoyably and efficiently as possible.

Whether it's a short stay in London or a family trip to Italy, HolidayCheck offers flights, hotels, vacation rentals, and cars for any occasion. The holiday ratings platform was founded in 1999 by two students in Switzerland, who were planning a trip to the Caribbean and could barely find any information on the hotel they had booked–so the idea of HolidayCheck was born. Following the success of the German version in 2003, the online platform went live in ten other languages, a success story that continues to this day. The requirement for IT to perform at the highest levels has become increasingly difficult due to rapid growth, steadily increasing traffic, and an overloaded storage system.

The Challenge

To continue supporting customers of the most visited travel portal in Germany as they arrange their perfect vacations, the objective of Maximilian Schöfmann, Head of Operations at HolidayCheck, and his team was clear: find a high-performance, faster, and effective storage solution to better handle demanding read-and-write operations.

"When users query a website, they ultimately reach a database and a related storage system. Due to our database's size, the volume of user requests, and limited storage capacity, our processes were taking too long," says Maximilian Schöfmann. "In addition, we needed to reduce storage system costs and relieve our IT team of complicated and time-intensive storage tasks—which would help make new resources available."

HolidayCheck's first step to address this challenge included using back-end systems equipped with VMware Virtual SAN™. With Virtual SAN, data from back-end systems can be transferred as quickly as with typical storage architectures, but done so much more easily and at significantly lower costs. As a next step, HolidayCheck is planning to deploy Virtual SAN to support additional customer-facing interactions online.

INDUSTRY
Tourism (Travel & Leisure)

LOCATION
Bottighofen, Switzerland

KEY CHALLENGES
- Existing storage system was overloaded
- Website development was too slow
- Risk of customer and revenue loss

SOLUTION
HolidayCheck AG optimizes its storage solution with VMware Virtual SAN to help ensure that customers reach their dream vacation destination in the shortest possible time.

BUSINESS BENEFITS
- Achieved a high-performance web portal
- Deployed a cost-effective storage system that works reliably and quickly
- Established self-service management to reduce demands on IT team
- Estimated savings of 35% compared to previous investment in storage support

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VMWARE FOOTPRINT
• VMware Virtual SAN
• VMware vSphere
• VMware vCenter
 Enterprise 5.5

The Solution

By 2012, HolidayCheck already transferred its Web site hosting to Host Europe Group. For HolidayCheck it was crucial for the hosting partner to operate web portals with the highest performance standards and to be an experienced provider offering 24/7, fully managed hosting services. Host Europe Group met these requirements. The company is the largest German-managed hosting services provider, currently serving more than 5,000 customers through several locations.

"Back-end systems at HolidayCheck were reaching their limits, and it was clear we had to look for a storage solution to significantly improve performance," says Helmut Esau, System Engineer at Host Europe Group. The existing physical storage systems, which were made up of local solid state disks (SSDs) in servers as well as dedicated isolated solutions, had to be replaced as soon as possible by a new high-performance solution.

"A single server failure would result in important virtual machines running databases to be taken out of operation. We absolutely wanted to prevent that from happening," says Maximilian Schöfmann. Therefore, he and his team sought support from Host Europe Group. "The capacity bottleneck at HolidayCheck had to be addressed with a suitable solution that could be easily integrated into the current infrastructure," says Helmut Esau. "Due to the existing VMware infrastructure based on VMware vSphere® and vCenter™ Enterprise 5.5, it was natural to use a VMware product for storage. With VMware Virtual SAN we introduced HolidayCheck to a compelling solution."

Business Benefits

Virtual SAN is a hyper-converged storage solution that optimizes the I/O data path and achieves a significantly higher performance than a virtual appliance or an external device. Moreover, Virtual SAN seamlessly integrates into the existing virtual vSphere infrastructure and scales storage resources without interruption.

In August 2014, Host Europe Group launched the implementation of VMware Virtual SAN at HolidayCheck. Thanks to the existing infrastructure hardly any new hardware had be upgraded and the project could be implemented quickly and cost effectively. Today, the new Virtual SAN solution helps ensure much better performance, enables reliable and fast processing of data in the background, along with a sustained increase in internal "Managed Services".

"The stability of the system is particularly important to our company during the peak travel season in summer. With VMware Virtual SAN we increased the reliability and functionality of our storage system. If we lose a host, other servers can take over quickly – something that would have been inconceivable with the old system," says Maximilian Schöfmann.

The implementation of Virtual SAN was successfully completed in the spring of 2015. The results speak for themselves: Because of the new solution, HolidayCheck saw a total cost saving of 35% compared to previous levels, since a live migration using Virtual SAN can be performed easily within the existing infrastructure.

Looking Ahead

The team is already working on another project. "Together with Host Europe Group, we are working to expand our storage and Virtual SAN solution to include a larger system and even faster platform," says Maximilian Schöfmann. And HolidayCheck is not the only one profiting. "Thanks to our partner VMware and the new Virtual SAN solution we can offer our customers performance, redundancy, and a low-cost storage option. Virtual SANis highly efficient and can be quickly integrated into an existing infrastructure. Therefore, we will also recommend the VMware solution to other customers," says Susanne Sandbichler, Senior Partner Manager, Strategic Partnerships, Host Europe Group.

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