Rent-A-Center Clears Private Cloud Visibility Issues with VMware

Rent-A-Center offers home furnishings, electronics, appliances and computers to consumers through flexible rental purchase agreements at more than 3,000 stores in the United States.

INDUSTRY
Retail

HEADQUARTERS
Plano, Texas

VMWARE FOOTPRINT
VMware vRealize Operations
VMware vRealize True Visibility Suite

Like many large retail organizations, Rent-A-Center's IT struggled to maintain a decentralized architecture running on local servers in individual stores and an exponential amount of data growth driven by modern point-of-sale and inventory management applications. In response, the company built a modern private cloud at its headquarters but needed a way to centralize IT operations management in the same way it consolidated its infrastructure.

The company chose VMware vRealize® Operations™ to run operations in the new software-defined data center but needed to expand vRealize Operations visibility over its entire IT footprint, including hardware to get the centralized operations management it desired.

Rent-A-Center turned to VMware vRealize® True Visibility™ Suite to:

• Consolidate monitoring into one view, instead of three different products
• Quickly isolate bottlenecks and resolve issues
• Recover 15 percent of its deployed infrastructure resources, worth $600,000
• Apply sizing analytics across all environments to streamline provisioning

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Challenges

Rent-A-Center's IT private cloud features Cisco UCS servers, HPE blade servers, Cisco Nexus switches, F5 BIG-IP load balancers and NetApp storage. The company struggled to monitor the stability and performance of its diverse IT environment through multiple, disparate tools. If Rent-A-Center had a problem with storage or hardware, it required three different products and logins to get the information needed and make sure everything was operating properly.

"We kept having a performance issue with an application set. First, we blamed it on the network, then on VMware, and then it was blamed on storage," said Mike Conroy, senior director of technical operations at Rent-A-Center. "We would all go looking for the root issue, but all of the sudden, it would magically clear up." The company's trusted partner Mobius recommended adding vRealize True Visibility Suite so the team could use the powerful vRealize Operations analytics engine and capacity planning forecasts beyond the virtual layer.

"Once we added vRealize True Visibility Suite, we figured out that an Oracle backup was sharing a distribution switch with an application set, which plugged everything down," said Conroy. "We would have never found it without VMware."

Control and end-to-end visibility

In the virtualization world, a view through vRealize Operations Manager™ is critical for monitoring. Expanding that view with vRealize True Visibility Suite capabilities resulted in a single pane of glass to apply powerful analytics to issues outside of the VMware environment.

Using vRealize True Visibility Suite management packs, Rent-A-Center was able to bring together Cisco UCS, SAP HANA, HPE and NetApp metrics, and add them into the native alerts, reporting, dashboards and capacity planning inside vRealize Operations. What's more, vRealize True Visibility Suite also brings visibility into how those resources are related, providing deeper insights into the health of the overall IT environment by connecting virtual machines and datastores with storage and compute details.

Relationship mapping in vRealize True Visibility Suite not only helped streamline management, it also guided the team when they had to head into the data center.

"We were able to take all those pieces for the hardware that supported our virtualization environment and expand visibility into the physical world," said Andrew Harrison, senior virtualization engineer at Rent-A-Center. "We were able to log in to one place, type in a host name, and bam! We can literally find any host in the environment now."

Newfound resources and next-level monitoring

Having deeper visibility into the environment also created newfound resources and greater productivity. Rent-A-Center recovered 15–20 percent of its hardware infrastructure resources, which is worth about $600,000.

"Now we can explore and focus more on new opportunities, as opposed to troubleshooting. We have some initiatives where we're moving some workloads from our FSC," said Harrison. "Now we can concentrate on that."

Rent-A-Center is also exploring additional management packs for an even broader view of its IT footprint. "Right now, I'm focused on integrating all of these great analytics and leveraging that with the SolarWinds management pack," said Harrison. "Being able to get that real-time data applied to the engine is going to be next-level monitoring."

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ANDREW HARRISON
SENIOR VIRTUALIZATION ENGINEER, RENT-A-CENTER