



CASESTUDY

CO. DEPT. OF EDUCATION



Location

North America

Industry

State Government

Company

Colorado Department of Education

Use Case

- VSI – VMware® vSphere®
- VDI – VMware Horizon

Business Transformation

Educators and administrators have fast, reliable access to information and tools needed to do their jobs effectively. The IT department gets a more productive infrastructure for its money, spends far less time on infrastructure management, and has a clear, standardized, highly cost-effective growth path for future IT services.

Challenges

- Inadequate infrastructure performance, particularly storage performance, put restraints on application and service delivery.

- Legacy systems were nearing end of life, and required replacement.
- Data reduction from an earlier flash system failed to meet promises.

IT Transformation

- Services can be deployed faster, without performance concerns.
- Data-reduction of 4:1 allows reduction in data-center space.
- Evergreen Storage capabilities creates a clear growth path with predictable expenditures.





FlashStack Infrastructure Gets Top Marks from CDE

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) supports schools in 178 districts throughout the state of Colorado. The department offers information, tools, and programs for a wide range of topics that are important to teachers and administrators. This includes curriculum, standards, training, test scores, educator effectiveness, and professional development.

“Having a FlashStack architecture makes it easier and faster to spin up new VMs and is infinitely easier to manage”

STEVE BERRYMAN
Infrastructure Manager

Some 56,000 teachers and 2800 administrators use the department’s website to download data and tools, and to upload information such as test scores and school statistics. CDE has an identity management process that simplifies and streamlines user logins for CDE data systems, and enhances security for student-level data. This process handles about 8500 user sessions daily.

About three-quarters of the department’s IT activity is outwardly focused, mostly toward teachers and administrators, with the remainder targeted at internal activities of the department.

“We operate a big data-gathering effort with all the end-points

we serve,” noted Infrastructure Manager Steve Berryman, who oversees compute, network, and storage resources for the department at its Denver offices. “The performance of our Cisco web servers is crucial to providing educators with the resources they need to effectively serve their students.”

Berryman is a pioneering designer of converged infrastructures, which combine compute, storage, and networking functions in a single chassis. He is intimately familiar with the advantages of combining Cisco® UCS® blade servers and networking products with storage systems and VMware virtualization software.





When Berryman needed to make major enhancements to his IT infrastructure, he knew he wanted a converged infrastructure similar to one he had created during his tenure at another office of state government. Although some vendors had converged infrastructure offerings, Berryman found them too expensive, and too complex to configure and manage.

“Their complexity negated many of the benefits you want from a converged infrastructure, like effortless installation and management, greater reliability, and a non-disruptive path for accommodating growth,” he noted.

“Pure Storage came in with a lower price, they had 10 TB more capacity, their data-reduction rate was much higher, and they had an awesome lifecycle-management story.”

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That’s why Berryman went with what he knew would work to achieve the converged infrastructure that the department needed. Specifically, he deployed UCS servers and Cisco Nexus® switches, VMware software, and a Pure Storage FlashArray//m20. Having determined that all-flash arrays were his choice for new storage equipment, he took full advantage of the FlashStack converged infrastructure design from Pure Storage and Cisco. It speeds time to deployment, lowers overall IT costs, and reduces deployment risk. Providing fully-tested converged infrastructure reference designs, FlashStack solutions are now sold by authorized resellers of Cisco and Pure Storage products

FlashStack Configuration Solves Multiple Problems

Berryman noted a number of benefits provided by a FlashStack infrastructure. “It’s much faster to spin up new VMs. It is more stable and reliable. And it definitely is easier to manage. It takes a lot less

time and expertise to manage the whole thing,” he explained.

The FlashStack infrastructure now handles all of the department’s IT needs with the exception of the backend Oracle database. This involves all the public-facing web servers, the VDI farm, SQL servers, and internal functions that include Exchange Messaging Server and a public-facing IBM Cognos business intelligence farm for data analysis and reporting.

In addition to solving the performance-related issues the department had encountered, the FlashStack configuration has greatly reduced storage-related management tasks.

“We really didn’t have the skill set on our IT staff necessary to support a traditional SAN environment,” Berryman noted. “It takes a lot of training, and it’s very complex. With Pure Storage, it’s so much easier. It has enabled us to focus our resources on high priorities, like virtualization, instead of having to worry about storage.”





Berryman says he especially appreciates the ability to monitor storage performance through VMware Operations Manager. He can monitor the health of the entire environment from a single pane of glass—including the Pure Storage flash array—during his morning cup of coffee, using the plug-in provided by Pure Storage.

“It makes it easy for me to keep an eye on storage. Knowing that it is monitored is a big relief, although I have to add that there has never been an issue with the performance or reliability of the Pure Storage array,” he said. “It’s astoundingly

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simple. You just set it once and leave it alone. It just sits there and runs without any need for attention.”

Not All Flash Storage Is Alike

Even before deciding on a FlashStack design, storage was already top of mind for Berryman. In late 2014, one of his computing providers complained of lagging performance from the department’s storage infrastructure. This resulted in the slowdown of some key applications, notably the Cognos farm for data analysis and reporting.

In addition, the spinning-disk storage system was nearing the end of life of its maintenance contract, so it was a good time to consider alternatives for meeting the department’s storage needs, Berryman said.

Berryman’s goal was to retire the hard-disk storage system he had been using to support the department’s web servers, and his

preference was to go with all flash. So he purchased a flash system from the provider of his legacy storage system. The results were disappointing.

“The system didn’t give me the data-reduction factor that I was expecting or promised,” he noted.

His goal was to get a data store of some 100 TB on the legacy hard-disk system compressed down to about 30 TB to give the system plenty of room to grow in the future. But the flash system he purchased, which the vendor promised would achieve a reduction of 6:1 to 7:1, only delivered 2.7:1.

So, Berryman looked for another provider of all-flash storage, and contacted Pure Storage. Once he knew that budget was available in the upcoming new fiscal year, he took advantage of the Pure Storage “Love Your Storage” program. This gives prospective customers the chance to use a Pure all-flash array for 30 days





with no obligation, and return it, no questions asked, if unhappy for any reason.

“I called the Pure Storage rep, and in less than a week they had a unit drop-shipped here, racked, and stacked, and production data was moved onto the flash array,” Berryman recalled. “It was a real luxury to be able to do a proof-of-concept (POC) for that amount of time prior to committing to a purchase. I wish I had done a POC before buying the original flash array.”

Berryman’s first inkling of what it’s like to deal with Pure Storage came very early on in the evaluation process.

“We had just started migrating data onto the evaluation unit, and I decided to push the device beyond normal thresholds. I got a call from Pure Storage support in less than 10 minutes, telling me they had seen some anomalies and offered ideas on how to help. In contrast, the vendor of the other flash system, which also was involved in the data migration,

took six hours to call us. Pure was definitely more proactive in getting to me before something blew up,” he recalled.

During the evaluation period, Berryman noted several positive results from the Pure Storage array. Based on the positive results of the POC, the decision in favor of a Pure FlashArray//m20 was easy.

“Pure Storage came in with a lower price, they had 10 TB more capacity, their data-reduction rate was much higher, and they had an awesome lifecycle-management story,” Berryman said.

That lifecycle management story is the Pure Evergreen™ Storage program, in which

customers are guaranteed non-disruptive upgrades to the latest technology as long as an array is under a maintenance contract.

“With Evergreen Storage, you get new controllers every three years, and there’s no disruption or forklift change of equipment. With traditional storage providers, you always wind up with a dead brick after three or four years, which you can’t resell or recoup money from.

“Having that lifecycle map for the Pure Storage array was an easy sell for the executives,” he added. “It’s a better use of money.”

Berryman also received the data reduction that he had wanted all along.





"I was skeptical about the data-reduction numbers Pure Storage promised because I had been oversold the first time we bought flash. So it was a real delight to see the Pure array come in and finish the job the other flash array started."

The Pure Storage array has delivered a data-reduction rate of 4:1, moving CDE toward its goal of repurposing room from the

data center, turning it into usable office space.

Berryman also pointed to another advantage the Pure Storage array offers to managers of virtualized environments.

"With thin provisioning, there's always concern with what's called zero-space clean-up. That's a situation where you only use a portion of a storage block to provision your virtual machines,

and you want access to the remaining space," he explained.

"What happened with our first flash device was that it didn't recognize the unused storage space, so we weren't able to capitalize on the savings from thin provisioning. You had to go into VMware and send a set of commands in order to reclaim that empty space.

"With Pure, that isn't a problem. It recognizes the unused space very gracefully."

Products and Services

Unified Computing FlashStack Converged Infrastructure:

- Cisco® UCS® servers
- Pure Storage FlashArray//m20
- VMware vSphere and Horizon

Cisco Networking and Security Solutions:

- Cisco Nexus® switches

flashstack@purestorage.com

www.cisco.com/go/flashstack

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