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Consulting • Systems Integration • Outsourcing
Infrastructure • Server Technology

SDI Delivers Business Intelligence

Scalable Server Architecture Accommodates Processing Growth
and Ensures High-Quality Service

Case Study



Imagine It

Update an existing server infrastructure to accommodate additional data processing and storage requirements – without jeopardizing the efficiency, accuracy, and reliability of core services.

Done

By implementing an infrastructure built upon Unisys ES7000 Enterprise Servers and EMC Symmetrix DMX-4 networked storage, SDI adopted a platform that delivers the power and agility needed to fuel its data-hungry business.

Results

With Unisys technology supporting its data processing, business intelligence (BI), and analytic capabilities, SDI established an environment that facilitates efficient access to a host of complex, integrated, and highly specialized information. As a result, the company is better positioned to quickly design and deliver services that address the diverse requirements of its client base.

Metrics

- **Cost:** Achieved quick, initial ROI via immediate gains in efficiency
- **Performance:** Maintained low, sub-60-minute SAS runtimes, and continued to provide support for up to 50 concurrent users
- **Service:** Delivered a broader range of client services without incurring additional administrative overhead or hindering responsiveness

Business Challenge: Enable Rapid Growth in a Data-Centric Business

The source to which the world's top pharmaceutical and healthcare companies turn for complex data analytics and professional services, SDI has long relied on technology to help it compile, process, and transform raw data into actionable, client-specific information.

And when it became clear that answering the demands of sophisticated BI processing required a robust, scalable, and reliable IT platform, SDI partnered with Unisys in 2006 to deploy two ES7000 Enterprise Servers and EMC Symmetrix DMX networked storage. This infrastructure allowed SDI to maximize the use of its Oracle 10g data warehouse, reduce SAS runtimes, and adopt a secure, manageable storage platform.

However, following an August 2008 acquisition that united the two largest companies in the longitudinal patient data space – and enabled SDI to expand its offerings to include both custom and pre-packaged analytics – the company once again realized that maintaining a viable competitive stance meant upgrading to a platform that could accommodate increased data processing demands and a host of new capabilities.

“After acquiring Verispan, we wanted to develop and deploy a modern, integrated data warehouse that addressed the processing requirements of both service sets on a single, scalable platform,” says Don Ragas, CIO.

Solution: A Powerful Platform for Data Warehousing and Analytics

While SDI considered servers from a number of vendors, it opted to build on the success of its partnership with Unisys and made an ES7000 Model 7600R Enterprise Server the foundation of its BI solution.

Powered by 6-core Intel® Xeon® 7400 series processors, this model delivers scalable, mission-critical performance in SDI's data-intensive Oracle 10g and Red Hat Linux® environment – and offers the headroom needed to support the additional processing demands that resulted from the merger. “Not only is the ES7000 Model 7600R server a straight shot in terms of scaling up our existing architecture, its capacity easily accommodates the 25TB of data we added after the acquisition,” Ragas says.

The updated environment once again included networked storage – this time in the form of an EMC® Symmetrix® DMX-4 system. Chosen for its considerable capacity and ability to secure large sets of information, this new storage solution promises to help SDI maintain the availability and reliability of its growing volumes of data.

What's more, SDI is continuing to gain value from the ES7000 Enterprise Server and EMC storage system that previously hosted its Oracle environment by using it to support the development and qualification of new or updated services.

“Previously, there was no separation between production and test efforts – both occurred on the same architecture in the same environment,” explains Ragas. “By leveraging our existing server and storage, we will be able to build a true, two-tier architecture with a dedicated testing and development area that allows us to write, stage, and deliver code to the production environment.”

Results: An Agile Infrastructure Supports a Booming Business

Operating in an updated environment that leverages a new ES7000 Model 7600R server, while also optimizing the use of existing ES7000 servers, has helped SDI:

- Achieve an immediate return on investment (ROI)
- Continue to deliver highly responsive SAS results to upwards of 50 simultaneous users
- Offload testing and development activities to a dedicated server resource
- Provide a greater range of services without sacrificing quality or timeliness

Though only live for a short time, SDI's new infrastructure has already begun to pay dividends. “The efficiencies we gained during the implementation phase alone provided quite a bit of payback,” Ragas says. “Once everything is operational and all of the data is fully integrated, we expect to see an even greater return by the end of the next calendar year.”



Profile: SDI

- Founded in 1982
- Headquartered in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania
- Employs approximately 650 staff members
- Maintains remote service facilities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Massachusetts

Solution at a Glance

- Unisys ES7000 Enterprise Servers, including an ES7000 Model 7600R
- EMC Symmetrix networked storage
- Microsoft Windows Server 2003, Enterprise Edition
- Red Hat Linux Enterprise
- Oracle 10g data warehouse
- SAS 9.1.3 business intelligence, including the base product and Extraction, Transformation, and Loading (ETL) and Enterprise Guide (EG) modules
- Unisys installation services

What's more, the original ES7000 supporting the SAS analytical engine has allowed SDI to continue to provide SAS access to roughly 50 concurrent users. "We've suffered no drop in SAS performance since the acquisition," says Ragas. "Additionally, the flexibility of the new ES7000 Model 7600R server has enabled our personnel to do more basic analysis via Oracle tools, which has helped us reserve the use of the more resource-intensive SAS capabilities for only the most sophisticated analyses."

And, despite taking on additional service offerings – and their associated processing requirements – the infrastructure supporting SDI's integrated data warehouse is up to the challenge. "The acquisition certainly added to our workload, but our Unisys servers are keeping us comfortably within our service windows," Ragas says. "Should we need to scale up or out again, we're confident that we have the platform in place to support that."

The Relationship: Working Together for Maximum Results

Unisys and SDI enjoy a collaborative partnership based on a shared understanding of how data center technology can respond to business challenges and drive success. "Unisys has been very open and willing to work with us to ensure that we have the right technology for the job," Ragas says. "For example, Unisys makes their test labs available to SDI so that we can see how the equipment performs under our specific operating conditions, which helps us evaluate and trust our decisions."

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Don Ragas
Chief Information Officer
SDI

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