

**Objective**

Rapidly running out of storage capacity, Staples Australia also wanted to find a storage solution that would cut costs and simplify administration

Approach

The IT team searched for a solution that was flexible, cost effective, easy to administer and would minimize the storage footprint

IT Matters

- Increased storage flexibility and efficiency
- Enabled tiering of business-critical applications
- Drastically simplified storage administration
- Facilitated the submission and tracking of support cases

Business Matters

- Reduced cost of storage by 9x, without impacting performance
- Achieved 30x reduction in datacentre footprint

Staples Australia chooses Nimble Storage

World's largest office products provider develops a more flexible IT strategy and gains enterprise-level



Staples Australia is a leading single-source supplier of business products and services and is part of Staples Inc, the world's largest office products company. The company provides products, services and expertise in the categories of office supplies, technology solutions, business furniture, print solutions, promotional marketing, kitchen supplies and facility solutions. With 88,000 associates worldwide, Staples operates in 26 countries throughout the world.

Challenge

Staples IT environment

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Shaun Butler, the IT platform lead for Staples Australia, oversees the team responsible for the company's core infrastructure technologies, including its virtualization, compute, storage, Oracle, Linux, and UNIX platforms. He is also responsible for laying out the strategic roadmap for Staples Australia's IT infrastructure and services and executing on that vision.

“Partnering with Nimble has enabled us to shift our IT direction from a ‘broad brush’ approach to storage, to a deeper level of architectural granularity. Nimble’s great efficiency and flexibility are allowing us to fulfil the storage requirements of all of our business units in a much more innovative way.”

– Fedele Galluzzo, infrastructure and operations manager, Staples Australia Pty Ltd

Staples Australia’s core ERP, supply chain, and financial services applications all run on SAP®. Staples also uses an innovative, internally developed ecommerce platform called NetXpress, which offers customers the convenience of secure ordering via the Internet 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This ecommerce platform allows users to manage their purchasing activities, from viewing stock on hand and order history, to setting up built-in approvals and budget controls for their organizations. Over 80 percent of Staples orders are attributed to ecommerce.

Prior to Nimble, Staples Australia was relying on a single storage array in each of its datacentres. This housed demanding, customer-facing workloads as well as those that were less critical.

“Before Nimble, we had a ‘one size fits all’ approach to storage,” notes Butler. “All of our applications were placed on the same tier, regardless of their level of criticality. We wanted to find a solution that would enable us to take a more strategic approach to IT, providing more flexibility for our business-critical workloads.”

Solution

A seamless transition to Nimble Storage

Butler and his team identified four criteria for the new storage solution. It must enable them to flexibly and cost effectively address their storage capacity issues, reduce the high cost of serving storage to Staples business units, lower complexity and administrative overhead, and minimize storage footprint and physical limitations in the company’s disaster recovery center.

“We considered the possibility of just adding more capacity to our existing environment, but that proved far too costly for the majority of our applications,” Butler reports. “As we widened our search, Nimble Storage quickly emerged as the leading candidate — they really nailed the four criteria. Nimble has developed an entirely new approach to storage that converges storage, backup, and disaster recovery into a single solution. The innovative way that Nimble software can deal with incoming I/O requests to provide robust performance in a significantly smaller footprint has enabled them to break away from the restrictions of traditional storage arrays.”



Staples Australia purchased two Nimble Storage Adaptive Flash arrays in 2013. “It was incredibly easy to deploy. We just plugged it right into the switching infrastructure. The transition has been completely seamless — our end users have not seen any impact in performance as a result of migrating from one storage platform to another,” Butler says.

The two Nimble arrays are now being used to run a variety of Staples Australia’s applications, including the company’s SQL Server database infrastructure as well as components of its SAP application landscape. “The performance of the Nimble arrays has been on par with our previous storage solution, which is absolutely amazing considering the cost to serve on a per GB basis is nine times less expensive,” according to Butler.

Although two-thirds of Staples’ block storage footprint was not tier one, it was all running on expensive tier one infrastructure. “We charge back each business unit for their resource consumption,” Butler explains. “With our previous storage platform, the price per gig was far too high for our business units to absorb. In contrast, Nimble Storage’s flash-optimized hybrid storage systems integrate the performance of flash with cost-effective high-capacity hard disk drives. Nimble’s storage model has enabled us to tier storage workloads by criticality and performance, substantially lowering our cost of service.”

Benefit

Reducing datacenter footprint

“With the small form factor of the Nimble arrays, Staples Australia has also been able to address the physical and heat-output constraints in the company’s disaster recovery centre. “The footprint savings with Nimble are quite impressive,” Butler shares. “59TB of Nimble storage only takes up six rack units. This equates to an almost unbelievable 30x reduction in rack space.

Staples Australia is using Nimble Storage InfoSight to monitor its two storage arrays. InfoSight provides a deep, comprehensive view into the performance and capacity of each storage array, enabling Butler and his team to easily troubleshoot and diagnose any problems or potential issues in the Nimble environment.

“Most storage products are good at the ‘here and now’ — they can give you a snapshot of current performance and throughput for, perhaps, the last 24 hours,” Butler explains. “Long-term trending capability for storage arrays traditionally requires additional (and expensive) monitoring and capacity products. In contrast, Nimble provides this capability as part of its core offering. Even better, this offering is cloud-based so we don’t have to maintain it ourselves.”

Case study

Staples Australia
Pty Ltd

Industry

Retail

Customer at a glance**HPE Solution:**

- Nimble Storage Adaptive Flash Arrays
- Nimble Storage InfoSight

Butler also points out the ability to track support cases from within the InfoSight console. "It has been a refreshing change to be able to liaise with a customer support organization where we can be sure our support ticket has been raised and know that the vendor's support engineers already have access to the same telemetry data that we do," Butler states. "Instead of trying to describe a complex problem over the phone and waiting for a callback — Nimble's support engineers get right down to diagnosing our issues immediately. That's a big plus in the support model that Nimble has deployed. It really feels like they are partnering with us in every sense of the word."

Improving data protection

Nimble has also enhanced recovery for Staples Australia. "The ability to use Nimble snapshot images and perform 'bare metal restores' on large VMs was a pleasant surprise," Butler states. "Nimble has given us far more flexibility with primary storage and data protection and a much more resilient infrastructure, at a much lower cost."

In case of a critical failure, infrastructure specialists can now restore directly from Nimble in one step, rather than having to rebuild the VM and then restore on top of that VM.

Conclusion

"Partnering with Nimble has enabled us to shift our storage direction from a 'broad brush' approach, to a deeper level of architectural granularity," concludes Butler. "Nimble's efficiency and flexibility are allowing us to fulfill our storage requirements and achieve strategic goals in a much more innovative way."

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