Marketeers connect better with customers

Growing affiliate marketing business uses innovative IT to drive development and new customer services with virtualization

Business need
Affiliate Window wanted to create a more flexible IT environment, making it easier to scale the infrastructure as the business expanded. It also looked to develop and deliver new services to customers.

Solution
The company worked with Dell Premier Partner Upgrade Options and built a virtualized infrastructure based on Dell™ PowerEdge™ blade servers, Dell PowerConnect™ switches and Dell Compellent storage arrays.

Benefits
- Business gains flexibility, launching servers in minutes not hours
- Company drives innovation for greater customer services
- IT reduces expense with multi-featured server enclosures
- Storage administrators raise productivity with better storage
- Business simplifies deployment with great collaboration

Application areas
- Networking
- Server Solutions
- Storage Solutions
- Support Services
- Virtualization

"Moving to a Dell virtualized infrastructure has given the company more agility. We can respond faster to business opportunities and drive development to enhance our services to customers."

James Findley, Technical Operations Manager, Affiliate Window

Affiliate Window is the UK's leading affiliate network. Headquartered in London, the business has succeeded by focusing on innovation and building a motivated workforce with a commitment to excellent customer service.

Affiliate marketing emerged following the establishment of the internet. It enables brands to sell their goods and services through affiliate networks in return for a percentage of the sales revenue, which goes to the site owners. Affiliate Window provides the technology to support a range of technical solutions and runs affiliate programmes for many leading global brands. For continued success, the business wanted to upgrade the IT supporting its affiliate services. Some of the technology was coming to the end of its life cycle and the company planned to relocate its data centre to a site in Slough, Berkshire. Affiliate Window saw this as an opportunity to transform its IT, moving to a new kind of architecture for greater scalability and simplified management. James Cohen, Technical Operations Director at Affiliate Window, says: "We could see the advantages of virtualization. Deploying applications and servers would be quicker and it would be easier for development teams to enhance our service offerings for customers."

Customer finds expert support from long-standing partner
The company turned to Dell Partner Upgrade Options, which is accredited in Dell server and storage solutions. Affiliate Window had already worked with Upgrade Options around the development of its existing rack-based server infrastructure, and was keen to engage with the business again. James Findley, Technical Operations Manager at Affiliate Window, says: "We've always received a responsive service from Upgrade Options. It understands how important IT is to a business like ours and appreciates

that we need to get it right." Upgrade Options then supported Cohen, Findley and their colleagues as they completed a detailed analysis of Dell solutions against those of competitors such as HP. "We were confident from the beginning because we knew we could access Dell expertise when we needed it," says Cohen.

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>
> *James Cohen, Technical Operations Director, Affiliate Window*

Technology at work

Services

Dell Support Services
– Dell ProSupport™ with Mission Critical
– Dell Compellent Copilot Support

Hardware

Dell Compellent™ Storage Center storage arrays

Dell™ PowerEdge™ M610 blades with Intel® Xeon® processors

Dell PowerEdge M1000e modular blade enclosure

Dell PowerConnect™M8024 switches

Software

Dell Compellent Data Progression

Dell Compellent Dynamic Capacity

Dell Compellent Data Instant Replay

Red Hat Enterprise Virtualization

Responsive services help to streamline the decision-making process

Affiliate Window quickly decided on the IT for its new virtualized infrastructure thanks to the support of Upgrade Options. It didn't take long to choose the servers because Affiliate Window had specific needs. Cohen says: "We compared Dell blade servers with HP blade servers. We thought the Dell blade servers were really well designed and right for our environment. They have more capacity than the HP blades and deliver a great combination of I/O (input/output) and memory to deliver hundreds of virtual machines."

Selecting the right storage was a more complex process. Affiliate Window didn't want to continue with its EMC system and looked to either NetApp or Dell Compellent storage arrays as replacements. The relationship with Upgrade Options really paid off at this point. Cohen says: "We wanted a lot of detailed information on Dell Compellent and got it from Upgrade Options. It put us in contact with Dell engineers, who gave us an in-depth walk-through the storage solution."

A series of meetings and web-based video conferences then followed. "When we compared Dell Compellent with NetApp, we could clearly see the specific benefits of Dell Compellent. We were interested in storage at the block level and Dell Compellent gave us the features for tiering and snapshotting our data. NetApp was more focused on file-level storage," says Findley.

Firm gains smooth deployment through collaboration

The IT team at Affiliate Window avoided any issues during the deployment. Upgrade Options ensured that the Dell servers and storage arrived on-site at the new data centre as scheduled and a Dell Compellent engineer helped IT personnel install and launch the storage. Cohen says: "Implementation was straightforward. We deployed the servers ourselves and the Dell Compellent engineer took care of the storage." The whole deployment

process took just a couple of days, and the IT team began working with the solution immediately.

Business increases agility to drive growth, launching new servers in minutes not hours

Affiliate Window can scale its networks and affiliate programmes more easily with its virtualized Dell solution. The IT team can now launch new virtualized servers in minutes – with purely physical servers, this took hours. "Moving to a Dell virtualized infrastructure has given the company more agility. We can respond faster to business opportunities and drive development to enhance our services to customers," says Cohen.

The business has 22 Dell™ PowerEdge™ M610 blade servers, located in two Dell PowerEdge M1000e modular blade enclosures. The servers, which include Red Hat Enterprise Virtualization software, currently support around 300 virtual machines, running applications for the networks and affiliate programmes.

IT lowers expense with multi-featured server enclosures

The IT team saves time and money with the Dell PowerEdge M1000e modular blade enclosures, which are designed to support future generations of blades, offer easy scalability and streamline the process for adding servers. Plus, with their integrated Dell PowerConnect™ M8024 switches, they remove the need for top-of-rack switches. "We like the way we can just plug a blade into the Dell PowerEdge M1000e enclosure and power it up," says Findley. "The integrated switches also deliver an important money saving."

Storage administrators increase productivity with simplified storage

Managing data is a lot more efficient with the Dell Compellent Storage Center arrays – which hold around 60 terabytes (TB) of data but have capacity for around 90TB. In the past, many of Affiliate Window's servers used internal disks for data and the EMC solution provided storage for just a small part of the infrastructure. However, the

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DELL

Dell Compellent arrays now store data for the entire infrastructure. "Our Dell Compellent Storage Center storage arrays do a lot more than our previous storage solution, but we haven't needed to expand the storage team because it's so easy to use," says Findley.

Company reduces costs with automated tiering

The company is getting increased value from its storage through features such as Dell Compellent Data Progression. It dynamically moves data between the three storage tiers that Affiliate Window has created. Data from the most active parts of its databases are held on its 15,000 rpm 6-gigabyte (GB) Serial Attached SCSI (SAS) disks. Less active data is automatically moved to slower 10,000 rpm 6GB SAS or to the third tier of 2TB near-line SAS drives. "The great thing about Dell Compellent Data Progression is that it automatically moves our data to the most cost-effective storage tier. We avoid the costs of physically moving the data and get the high performance we need," says Cohen.

Business drives innovation for greater customer services

IT staff can allocate capacity to development projects in moments with Dell Compellent Dynamic Capacity. In addition, using Dell Compellent Data Instant Replay, developers can work with a full copy of the database. It now takes just minutes for IT personnel to allocate storage and provide a snapshot of a production database. Findley says: "Because of the flexibility of our Dell Compellent storage infrastructure, we can do a lot more testing and development. We've created an innovate environment for our development team, which will help us deliver value-adding services for customers."
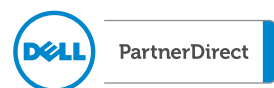
Customer maximises value with responsive support services

The company is successfully protecting its IT investment with Dell ProSupport™ with Mission Critical four-hour on-site response for the servers and Dell Compellent Copilot Support for the storage arrays. Both servers and storage have performed well, and Affiliate Window has had to call on Dell support only once. Cohen says: "A good thing about Dell Compellent Copilot Support is that you speak to people who know a lot about storage. You don't lose time going through first-line support." Findley also likes the fact that he can speak to experts from Dell ProSupport and Dell Compellent Copilot Support on the same phone call. "It's much easier working with Dell Support Services, because there's good collaboration between the different teams," says Cohen.

About Upgrade Options

Upgrade Options, headquartered in Surrey, is an independent business-to-business computing reseller that services both the private and public sectors. While specialising in servers, storage and services, the company also uses its alliances with leading industry vendors to provide customers with a wide range of solutions, including virtualization and IT security. Upgrade Options has partnered with Dell for more than 10 years.

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