Janus International Group Upgrades to Nutanix

Leading manufacturer of storage building solutions migrates to Nutanix to simplify scalability, ease infrastructure management, improve DR, and support fast company growth.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

By moving to Nutanix Enterprise Cloud, Janus International Group was able to cut the amount of time required for standing up new nodes by at least 75%, improve disaster recovery, and simplify scalability. By reducing ongoing infrastructure complexity, the IT team is now able to focus on continuous improvement processes instead of routine maintenance.

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>
> – Greg Smith, Operations and Infrastructure Manager, Janus International Group

INDUSTRY
Manufacturing and distribution

CHALLENGES
- Aging infrastructure was due for a refresh
- Legacy HP server platform was difficult to manage
- Hyper-V failover was not automatic

SOLUTION
Nutanix Enterprise Cloud Platform

- Acropolis Software, including built-in hypervisor AHV
- Prism management plane
- NearSync replication

Applications

- MS Exchange and SQL databases StarShip shipping software
- Liaison billing software
- ERP system

NUTANIX
YOUR ENTERPRISE CLOUD

CHALLENGE

Janus International Group is a leading manufacturer of turnkey self-storage building solutions, steel roll-up and swing doors, hallway systems and relocatable storage units, and facility automation tools. The company has grown very rapidly since it was founded in 2001, with a 20% CAGR over the last four years. "When I started working here in 2015, we were still using the original IT infrastructure that was put in place when we were a small company," explained Greg Smith, operations and infrastructure manager at Janus International Group. "We had clearly outgrown what we had, so we decided to implement an entirely new IT infrastructure across the board."

Janus was relying on a collection of aging HP servers, running Microsoft Hyper-V. "We were having a lot of problems with that environment, especially in regards to disaster recovery," Smith reported. "Even though we had a two-node cluster and had already replicated the data, it was still a manual process to failover from one machine to the other. If we were out of the office during a disaster, the systems would remain offline until someone arrived onsite to restore operations."

SOLUTION

Janus International Group enlisted the help of CDW—a leading technology solutions provider, serving business, government, education, and healthcare organizations in the US, the UK, and Canada—to select a new solution for the refresh. "CDW suggested we look at hyper converged solutions," Smith said."I must admit, we were still a bit apprehensive of the new technology, but CDW said they'd stake their reputation on the performance of the Nutanix platform." Smith and his team compared the costs and ease of expansion of the proposed solutions and talked to some very enthusiastic Nutanix customers. With the positive recommendation from CDW and the excellent test results, they purchased a 3-node Nutanix cluster in January of 2016.

"We decided to go with the Nutanix-branded hardware instead of their third-party offerings, like Dell or HP," explained Smith. "Obtaining everything from a single vendor simplifies support with just one number to call for everything in the environment. When you're running as lean as we are, you don't have a lot of time to spend on the phone chasing people around."

Running all Workloads on Nutanix

All of Janus International Group's applications are now running on Nutanix. "The Nutanix engineers helped us stand up a few virtual machines and showed us how the infrastructure worked," said Smith. "It was amazingly easy to learn how to use the systems." Smith started by moving the company's physical machines to VMware. Within a month, they had 78 VMs running on Nutanix, including their MS Exchange environment, SQL servers, ERP application, terminal server farm, and several file servers. They are also running their mission-critical manufacturing application on Nutanix, a Liaison billing app, and their Starship shipping system.

One-click Hypervisor Migration

Once the Nutanix systems were deployed, Janus migrated all enterprise workloads from Hyper-V to VMware ESXi. "Since I had been trained on VMware, it seemed like it would be easier to move to ESXi than to learn Hyper-V," admitted Smith. "But I was also wary of putting traditional VMware infrastructure into our environment. There are only three of us that are responsible for our systems, and VMware is very time-consuming to manage."

After running VMware on Nutanix for over a year, Janus made the decision to switch again, this time from ESXi to AHV. "In addition to obtaining just one vendor for all of our hardware, software, and hypervisor solutions, we made the move to AHV for budget reasons. We were already using Nutanix, and AHV is included for free. We obtained all of the hypervisor functionality we needed with AHV, plus a significant cost reduction by eliminating our VMware licensing fees."

CUSTOMER OUTCOME

Janus purchased an additional Nutanix 4-node cluster in 2017 and placed it in the company's co-lo facility. They deployed that system as a primary and used the older G4 cluster for backups. "We have to keep our ERP system running all of the time. Without that mission-critical application, we can't ship, we can't order, and we can't bill our customers," explained Smith. "We now have direct connections between all 12 of our sites and back to headquarters, so if something happens to any one of those systems, it automatically fails over."

Janus is using Nutanix NearSync to protect data with one-minute snapshots. NearSync ensures minimal data loss in case of a disaster, with more granular control during the restore process. "We actually had to test failover with NearSync before we were ready," admitted Smith. "Due to an unexpected fiber cut in our headquarters, we were forced to fail over to the co-lo before the test. Luckily, it worked beautifully! We didn't have to do anything, it just came up on its own without any issues. Once the fiber was restored, it automatically failed back and all of our VM files started working immediately."

Keeping Up with Growth and Expansion

The Nutanix infrastructure has enabled Janus to keep pace with its fast growth rate. "Nutanix makes it very easy to scale and grow our business," Smith said. "When we added the four Nutanix nodes last year, we just plugged them in, attached the Cisco switches, copied the configurations, clicked 'discover new nodes', and we were done. Moving from VMware to Nutanix and AHV cut the time of standing up new nodes by at least 75%."

Increased Reliability and Simplified Management

Janus has grown from six sites to 12, and 500 employees to 1,200 over the last four years. But despite more than doubling in size, they have only had to increase the number of IT staff by one. "Nutanix runs so well that I had to put a reminder in my calendar to go check the systems from time to time to make sure they're OK," admitted Smith. "It's very easy to forget about them since they're so reliable. When you're running as lean and growing as fast as we are—there are a lot of IT projects that need to be addressed. I don't want our team spending time fiddling around with infrastructure. Nutanix is simple to deploy, easy to manage, and extremely reliable. The Enterprise Cloud platform is everything I hoped it would be—and much more."

Obtaining Great Nutanix Support

"Nutanix support is incredible," Smith acknowledged. "I called the help line on a Saturday and a technical expert answered within three rings. No one offers that kind of support anymore! It's reassuring to know that when we need help, Nutanix will be there. If we have an issue with one of our systems when we're away from the office, Nutanix immediately calls us to say they've noticed a problem and have already dispatched an engineer to our site. With this level of proactive support, I can actually relax on weekends now."

NEXT STEPS

Janus International Group has acquired several other business entities recently, and will be replacing their infrastructure with Nutanix in the next few months. Their plan is to either use Nutanix Xi Cloud services or the newly acquired sites as NearSync repositories. "Nutanix has enabled us to switch from fire-fighting mode with our aging infrastructure — where our only goal was keeping it on life-support — to focusing on the continuous improvement processes that will enable our company to thrive," concluded Smith.

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