“The Hitachi storage was never a topic for discussion because downtime was nonexistent; it would just sit in the background and do its job. This is what we were looking for — a reliable storage foundation that we wouldn’t have to worry about — giving us a high degree of confidence in its reliability.”

Peter Alford
Director and Commercial Manager
ITonCloud

ITonCloud

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ITonCloud Manages Cloud Hosting Services and Boosts Availability for Customers in Australia with Hitachi Technology

Established in 2008, ItonCloud provides cloud computing solutions to small, medium and large businesses, including application and server hosting, and disaster recovery. ItonCloud needed a high-performance and reliable storage infrastructure to handle the application and server hosting on behalf of its customers. The company deployed a Hitachi modular storage solution, including Hitachi IT Operations Analyzer software, to maximize the availability and performance of its services to customers.

Background

ItonCloud provides mission-critical hosting for midsize organizations across Australia and New Zealand, with its managed desktop, hosted applications and disaster recovery solutions all serviced through its Equinix data center in Mascot, Sydney. Customers range from software distributors like TrackitOnline to immigration legal specialists such as Ajuria Lawyers. ItonCloud also supports customers in the financial and healthcare verticals.

As small and medium-size businesses (SMBs) largely require enterprise-level capabilities, ItonCloud has been built around enterprise standards. The company delivers IT as a service to all clients in an affordable and flexible subscription format, providing them with the ability to scale their service in line with their daily user requirements.

The applications hosted by ItonCloud include every tool that a business would need. These may range from the email client and office productivity suite (Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) to more complex and custom-built business applications, such as high-end finance, healthcare and case management software.

Demand for High-availability Cloud Infrastructure

According to Peter Alford, director and commercial manager at ItonCloud, there is a huge demand from SMBs to move their data and applications into a hosted environment. “What we’re increasingly seeing is that SMBs get to the point where they need to undertake a major IT infrastructure upgrade to accommodate their business growth, but once they weigh up the cost of all the new equipment and license upgrades, it makes far more business sense for them to switch to pure operating costs. This strategy is more cost-effective and means that they can solely focus on running their business.”

To meet the growing need by remote workers to access all of their information while on the road, ItonCloud’s managed desktop service works with mobile devices such as iPad, iPhone and Android and is device-agnostic; it delivers Microsoft Windows applications onto Apple-based products. This enables customers to access all of their applications and data from any device or location.

“This is something we’re seeing massive demand for and is a real differentiator for us,” says Alford. “Many of our customers have a preference to use Apple devices but previously couldn’t use them with Windows-based applications. ItonCloud gives them the freedom to use any device, regardless of the application they need to use, and this service comes as standard with our solution.”

The Search for a Solution

ItonCloud had initially built a pilot storage infrastructure based on temporary equipment to get its service up and running. However, due to unprecedented customer demand, the company quickly recognized that it needed a more robust and high-performance

“In the 2 years that the AMS 2100 has been in deployment we have had zero downtime, which is incredible. Even during major software upgrades, maintenance or when adding more storage capacity we have been able to provide our customers with 99.999% data availability, which is exactly what we were hoping for from the product.”

Peter Alford
Director and Commercial Manager
ITonCloud
storage infrastructure to deliver a high-availability cloud infrastructure.

“We were also predicting year-on-year data growth of 100% per annum due to high growth from existing customers as well as the increasing number of customers that we were taking on board, with at least 2 new clients signing up per month,” says Alford.

After evaluating offerings from all major vendors, ITonCloud deployed Hitachi Adaptable Modular Storage 2100 (AMS 2100), a high-performance, reliable and scalable storage system that provides enterprise-grade performance to manage its customers’ data and applications. The provision, deployment and configuration of AMS 2100 was managed by Hitachi TrueNorth™ Partner and distributor Lynx Technologies.

Enhanced Availability and Performance for ITonCloud

“We were looking at 3 key areas for our storage infrastructure: reliability, performance and the ability to have modular expansion. And Hitachi ticked all of the boxes,” says Alford.

As ITonCloud operates in a fast-paced cloud computing environment, the company needs to manage the expectations of its customers 24/7, so reliability is fundamental. “A number of the senior management team had been involved in sites with Hitachi storage systems in the past,” recalls Alford. “In these cases, the Hitachi storage was never a topic for discussion because downtime was nonexistent. It [the Hitachi storage] would just sit in the background and do its job. This is what we were looking for – a reliable storage foundation that we wouldn’t have to worry about – giving us a high degree of confidence in its reliability.”

Hitachi also provided ITonCloud with the ability to simply increase storage capacity in line with business growth. “Our engineers have used multiple Hitachi products, and their performance has never been in question. The modular expansion meant that we could rest assured that we were investing in a platform for the future,” says Alford.

Since deployment of Hitachi AMS 2100, the platform has lived up to all expectations. AMS 2100 is used to house all of the virtual servers. This includes individual servers that process and manage infrastructure, from mail servers, virus filtering and data backup, to servers hosting client applications and data.

“In the 2 years that AMS 2100 has been in deployment we have had zero downtime, which is incredible,” said Alford. “Even during major software upgrades, maintenance or when adding more storage capacity we have been able to provide our customers with full data availability, which is exactly what we were hoping for from the product. We’re also able to reconfigure the storage without any loss of uptime or performance.”

Improved Network Monitoring

In 2011, ITonCloud deployed the Hitachi IT Operations Analyzer to handle all monitoring and management of its network infrastructure. IT Operations Analyzer is a performance and availability monitoring software that provides easy-to-manage monitoring and diagnostic capabilities for multivendor, multiplatform environments — all from a single screen. The software is able to reduce the mean time to fault diagnosis by up to 90%.

ITonCloud’s previous monitoring system had a number of limitations and didn’t allow the organization to group IT resources as required. IT Operations Analyzer was able to fill these gaps, while also providing ITonCloud with a number of additional features and flexibilities.

“The most important benefit of the IT Operations Analyzer is that it’s vendor agnostic, like all Hitachi products, allowing us to monitor consistently across multivendor applications, giving us considerable flexibility in our monitoring,” said Alford. “We get alerts for any abnormal activity on the network, and if any of the equipment is working beyond certain thresholds, our engineers can drill down into the issue and remediate before it becomes a threat.”

ITonCloud Looks Ahead

ITonCloud currently has in excess of 30TB of usable storage, of which around 70% is being utilized, with the ability to scale up in line with customer demand. Alford adds: “We’re currently taking on at least 2 new clients per month, which obviously increases the amount of data being stored on the Hitachi platform. To accommodate this growth we’re able to simply add additional storage modules to the chassis without any downtime. The number of customers being added to the environment is expected to double at least during 2012.”

In line with its exponential data growth, ITonCloud is looking to conduct a major storage upgrade of its AMS 2100 during 2012, with the next step being the purchase of additional AMS 2000 family systems. These AMS systems will provide ITonCloud with full production-grade capacity at Verb DC, its 2nd data center located in Wyong, New South Wales. This facility is required for customers’ production and disaster recovery solutions that need to be geographically separated outside the Sydney metro area in order to reduce risk.