



San Francisco District Attorney's Office Leverages Nutanix in Digital Transformation

Nutanix Enterprise Cloud Chosen as the Ideal Platform for Empowering the DA's Technology-Driven Workforce

INDUSTRY

Legal Services, Government

CHALLENGES

- Aging HPE server environment was due for a refresh
- Preparing for move into a more advanced facility to support digital transformation
- Wanted to improve infrastructure efficiency and manageability

SOLUTION

- Nutanix Enterprise Cloud
 - Acropolis, including AHV virtualization
 - Prism management software
- New generation HPE ProLiant systems

BUSINESS BENEFITS

By moving from its legacy infrastructure to Nutanix software and HPE ProLiant systems, the San Francisco's District Attorney's office was able to cut infrastructure management time in half, enabling its IT staff to focus on more strategic projects and innovation. The performance, reliability and efficiency of the Nutanix platform enabled the DA's IT Staff to focus on other projects such as implementation of a new Case Management System. By reducing complexity from their legacy systems and leveraging inherent secure design features in Nutanix, they improved overall IT security and compliance. Cost reductions are planned by eliminating the ongoing VMware hypervisor licensing fees and has reduced its data center footprint.



"With the move to Nutanix, we've become a highly efficient, tech-savvy law firm that represents the government, not just a government agency that practices law."

- Herman Brown, CIO, San Francisco District Attorney's Office

CHALLENGE

The San Francisco DA's Office is the legal agency responsible for prosecuting crimes in the City and County of San Francisco. In addition to the thousands of court cases handled per year, the DA's Office offers a variety of proactive community services to its constituents, including a victim services unit and a neighborhood outreach program that educates youth on crime prevention.

“Our goal is to make San Francisco one of the safest large cities in the US, but we also want to prevent the crimes from happening in the first place. That’s where our outreach programs come into place,” noted Herman Brown, CIO.

Brown and his team are responsible for supporting the IT needs of the agency’s 320 attorneys and staff members, and up to 100 student interns that work in the office throughout the year. “The role of technology in the DA’s Office has become increasingly important over the past few years,” Brown said. “There has been a steady progression of IT from just being a support center, to having a seat at the table with the executive team where we talk about overall agency strategy and direction, and examine how technology can us help meet our goals.”

One of the biggest challenges Brown faces as CIO is keeping up with the ever-increasing expectations of the agency’s end users, while staying within the allocated IT budget. “My primary goal is to implement all of the new applications and innovative technologies our employees need to be productive, ensuring that everything runs as simply, reliably, and quickly as possible — within our annual budget,” explained Brown.

SOLUTION

Brown and his team started looking for new IT infrastructure to replace the aging HPE server environment in 2018. The team evaluated several hyperconverged solutions, including Nutanix Enterprise, Dell EMC VxRail, and Scale Computing HC3. “We created a matrix of the pros, cons, and benefits of each solution. Nutanix was the clear winner in every measure, including performance, cost, and reliability,” Brown reported.

The DA’s Office made the decision to purchase Nutanix OS software and deploy it on HPE ProLiant hardware. “We’ve always been happy with our HPE servers – it’s a solid solution. Finding out that Nutanix was compatible with HPE was just the icing on the cake,” said Brown. The DA’s Office is now running all of its enterprise, legal, and office productivity applications file sharing and print servers, DHCP, Active Directory, and SQL Server workloads on the Nutanix platform.

CUSTOMER OUTCOME

More Time to Innovate

The move to Nutanix has eliminated nearly all of the overhead and maintenance tasks associated with the legacy infrastructure. “With Nutanix, we’ve cut the time required to manage the environment in half,” said Brown. “We currently have about 30 IT projects on our radar, so there are always plenty of more important things our team can work on instead of just managing infrastructure.”

Brown and his team are also using Nutanix’s analytics and dashboards to present information in real-time, not only for the IT support services staff, but for the entire agency. “When anyone comes to us for assistance, they can look at the Nutanix dashboard and see all of the information they need. That saves a lot of time for our end users, and also enables our IT team to focus on more strategic projects.”

Keeping Up with the Influx of New Data

The separate worlds of technology and law have collided in a big way recently with the rollout of body-worn cameras by police officers. Surveillance, video, Nest, and other monitoring solutions are now available to the average citizen. As a result, a large number of the DA’s cases now involve cellphone video evidence or photos people have taken on the street.

“Being able to determine where defendants have been and placing them at the scene of a crime is huge in solving our cases,” explained Brown. “We also developed a forensic lab in our office where we can do social media tracking, and pinpoint cellphone usage based upon cellular triangulation. Criminals are becoming

much more sophisticated every day, so we have to remain diligent to stay ahead of them. The Nutanix platform is enabling us to manage the huge influx of digital data from all of these new sources, obtaining the necessary evidence to try and convict any guilty parties.”

Moving into a New Facility

The DA's Office recently moved from its existing location in San Francisco into a more modern facility. “Before the move, the DA and I sat down and talked about making the new building a technology haven for our agency, with A/V equipment mounted on the walls of our conference rooms and Wi-Fi access throughout the building,” said Brown. “We also added a multipurpose room with a podium, microphone, and camera so we can record press conferences, training sessions, and events in that room and stream them live to the DA Twitter account or Facebook.”

The DA's office made the decision to upgrade all of its legacy infrastructure before the move. “The cost per square foot for real estate in San Francisco is extremely high, so we wanted to shrink the footprint as much as possible before we moved into the new facility,” explained Brown. “That's another way Nutanix is helping us save money. The small form factor of the Nutanix and HPE solution is helping us reign in our data center expenditures going forward.”

Empowering a Mobile Workforce

The DA's Office is committed to helping its employees work remotely. All of the agency's staff and legal professionals are now given a mobile device so they can work equally well inside or outside of the office, including in the courtroom. Brown and his team are also implementing a new case management system that will support the staff's ability to easily access files remotely.

“Historically when lawyers went to court, they packed all of their papers into large boxes and rolled them into the courtroom using ‘shopping carts,’” explained Brown. “The ability to safely and securely digitize all case records is giving our attorneys much more flexibility. They will be able to walk into the courtroom with just a laptop or a tablet, and access all the information they need without flipping through dozens of paper folders. This will increase their efficiency as lawyers, and ultimately, their ability to win cases.”

Reigning In Costs

“One of the biggest challenges we face in IT is obtaining the budget to implement new technologies, versus just enough funds to just keep the lights on,” noted Brown. “Since we rarely have enough resources — time, money, or people — to implement everything we'd like, we have to be very strategic about how we spend our budget.”

One of the ways the DA's Office was able to reign in IT costs was by moving from VMware to AHV, the Nutanix hypervisor. “We were getting tired of paying the annual subscription fees for vSphere,” admitted Brown. “Migrating to AHV allowed us to move away from that paid service to a more economical and efficient solution, allowing us to spend our IT budget more strategically. Nutanix is enabling us to modernize our law firm, resulting in more efficient use of tax dollars. Our constituents in San Francisco should be very happy that we're utilizing Nutanix technology because it enables us to do more with less.”

Improving Data Security

The DA's Office is also responsible for the security and compliance of all data in its criminal justice information system(CJIS). “We need to ensure that our confidential data is protected at all times,” said Brown. “We're always on the lookout for anyone maliciously attempting to breach or share our data, but we must also make sure that breaches aren't happening internally through lack of knowledge of the processes and procedures in place to protect that data.”

Nutanix is helping the DA's Office address the all-important security aspect of its data through encryption at rest for digital records, consolidating everything into one ‘source of truth’ on Nutanix. “Being able to encrypt data at rest is very important. If a breach ever does happen, that information is useless to anyone with unauthorized access,” stated Brown. “The Nutanix technology is enabling us to minimize the risk of both internal and external data breaches.”

A Great Partnership with Nutanix

“Nutanix is a really great company to work with,” Brown acknowledged. “The team always makes me feel like I’m their only customer. Their support engineers provide real-world responses and answers to all of our issues and questions very quickly. They even offered to sit with us during the installation, just to look over our shoulders and provide guidance as we got up to speed on the new infrastructure.”

Brown also appreciates the high-level of support resulting from the HPE and Nutanix partnership. “With Nutanix and its close partnership with HPE, Nutanix or HPE can triage what the issues are, and then when needed work collaboratively with each other to resolve the problem.”

NEXT STEPS

“Nutanix has been a wonderful business partner — not just another company that wants to sell me something. Furthermore, the efficient and powerful Nutanix solution is enabling us to deploy new applications and services quickly and easily to our lawyers and legal staff. With the move to Nutanix, we’ve become a highly efficient, tech-savvy law firm that represents the government, not just a government agency that practices law,” concluded Brown.



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