

Case Study: Independent Alliance Banks

Company Background:

Independent Alliance Bank, Inc. (IAB) is an alliance of community banks, operating independently of each other to grow their business by focusing on customers. Every IAB bank is committed to providing professional, personal service and strong community leadership.

Independent Alliance Banks was established in 2005 and is currently a two-bank holding company that includes Grabill Bank and Markle Bank. IAB employs approximately 265 people in local Indiana communities which include Fort Wayne, New Haven, Leo, Grabill, Harlan, Markle, Bluffton, Van Buren, Warren and Huntington.

The Challenge:

When Markle Bank and Grabill Bank joined Independent Alliance bank they merged their physical datacenters into a single location in Fort Wayne as part of their consolidation. This consolidation allowed them to pool their technical expertise and thus reduce some of the overhead resulting from multiple physical datacenters, including such things as floor space, electricity, cooling, security and fire suppression. As the overall technology plan for the new alliance became more focused a paramount goal emerged. The technology team was faced with the challenge to develop an infrastructure that allowed for the integration of new banks into the system while at the same time reducing costs. As the infrastructure moved towards a hosted application model a platform was needed that would conform to contractual service level agreements and the related disaster recovery needs.

The Solution:

ENS worked closely with IAB to understand their business goals and develop a plan that would address the challenges they faced. In the planning phase ENS helped design the new infrastructure, evaluate costs, and create timelines for implementation.

The Technical Aspect:

This design included two major infrastructure changes. The first major change necessary was the integration of the disparate Microsoft Active Directory (AD) forests into a single AD forest. The second major change was a shift to server virtualization.

Each change provided its own set of benefits and advantages.

The AD forest consolidation included the following technologies:

- Microsoft Windows Server 2003, 2000, and NT 4.0
- Microsoft Exchange 2003 and Microsoft Mail
- Citrix Metaframe and Presentation Server
- Line of Business Applications included several packages from the Fiserv (formerly ITI) product line.

The AD forest merger allowed for multiple benefits, including:

- A reduction in the amount of AD domain controllers, DNS servers, hardware, and the associated Microsoft licensing in comparison to multiple AD forests

- A reduction in the amount of Microsoft Exchange Servers, hardware, and the associated Microsoft licensing in comparison to multiple AD forests
- A reduction in the amount of Citrix Presentation Servers, hardware, and the associated Microsoft and Citrix licensing in comparison to multiple AD forests
- Easier consolidation of administration
- Reduced complexity allowing for a simpler administration model
- Less complexity in application or technology implementation as integration with a single AD forest allows for a single point of integration to access user information and security principles
- A foundation that allows for a granular security model if the need arises for delegation of administration tasks across multiple IT departments

The implementation of virtualization included the following technologies:

- VMware ESX 3.5
- Storage Area Network Infrastructure

The benefits derived from virtualization included:

- Consolidation of application and operating system hardware therefore reducing the need for a large number of physical servers (IAB has been able to consolidate 20+ servers onto 3 physical hosts). In turn, this reduces the reoccurring costs of power, cooling, space, etc.
- Increased redundancy from hardware failure; if a host becomes unavailable images can be hosted by any of the remaining live hosts.
- Portability of virtual servers as they are not as tied to the physical hardware as are the traditional OS installations
- Quicker recovery time in the event of disasters as virtual OS and application reinstallation and configuration are not needed
- Virtual images are easily replicated across WAN links to secondary datacenters or disaster recovery locations thus creating a springboard for a complete and time responsive disaster recovery plan
- Reduction of Microsoft licensing costs

With the assistance of ENS Group's consulting and implementation teams, IAB has been able to successfully and cost effectively meet their business objectives. 🙌



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