

ENTERPRISE STORAGE, SMALL BUSINESS PRICE

With the Dell PowerVault MD3000, hosting provider Rackspace is able to offer its clients the benefits of an enterprise-level storage area network while keeping prices down

In the hosting business, an application server is only as good as the storage to which it's connected. But enterprise-level storage area network (SAN) technology comes at a premium not all companies can afford, and many organizations can get all the performance and availability they need from direct-attached storage (DAS).

Founded in 1998 in San Antonio, Texas, hosting provider Rackspace Hosting, Inc. runs more than 42,000 servers in eight data centers in the U.S., Hong Kong and U.K. It holds a total of 1.5 petabytes in storage, most of it stored across 50 Dell/EMC storage arrays.

To remain competitive and offer customers a more affordable option for dedicated storage, Rackspace recently introduced a DAS offering using Dell PowerVault MD3000 highly available modular disk arrays.

STAYING AHEAD OF STORAGE DEMANDS

Rackspace began using Dell/EMC storage products in 2003, and now has over 3,000 SAN-attached hosts. "We really appreciate the scalability of Dell/EMC storage products, and that's the primary reason we have been using them for the past five years," says Chad Smykay, a storage architect at Rackspace Hosting. "Our SAN offering has grown significantly over the past two years, and our DAS offering has been successful in its first year. The great thing

about the Dell PowerVault MD3000 is that it allows us to do out-of-band management so that we can manage direct-attached storage for our customers without having to go through their dedicated servers. We estimate an overall time savings of 10-15 minutes per device because we can manage them through a central pane of glass as opposed to having DAS devices with no out-of-band management."

Built for high-performance two-node clusters or direct attachment of up to 4 Dell PowerEdge servers, the PowerVault MD3000 installs quickly using wizard-guided tools and is capable of housing up to 15 3.5-inch SAS or SATA disk drives in a single 3U rack enclosure. The MD3000 is expandable by simply adding up to two additional expansion enclosures for a total of 45 drives. The entire array subsystem is managed from a single software application—known as the Modular Disk Storage Manager—which streamlines the management and maintenance of storage as it scales. Rackspace can add additional storage capacity to the MD3000 quickly and easily without disruption to operations, enabling high availability for customer data.

"We chose the Dell PowerVault MD3000 to round out our external storage and offer our customers enterprise-level service and reliability at a small



CUSTOMER PROFILE

COUNTRY: Global (U.S., Hong Kong and U.K.)

INDUSTRY: Hosted IT Services

FOUNDED: 1998

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 2,400+

WEB ADDRESS:

www.rackspace.com

CHALLENGE

To stay competitive, Rackspace must offer fast, reliable storage in a variety of tiers. It needed to minimize the cost of hardware and support, as well as delays in getting parts or technical advice.

SOLUTION

Rackspace turned to Dell for a flexible, scalable storage platform including Dell™ PowerVault™ direct-attached storage and Dell/EMC SAN arrays.

BENEFITS

GET IT FASTER

- Quick storage installation via wizard guided tools

RUN IT BETTER

- Ability to meet customers' performance requirements with no downtime to their applications

GROW IT SMARTER

- High availability for customer storage
- Savings of 10-15 minutes per day per device managed
- Offer cost-effective direct-attached storage solution to customers
- Increased demand for hosted SAN storage offering accommodated



business price,” says Chris Wetzel, who manages Rackspace’s product management team for platforms. “It has all the critical features we’re looking for: speed, capacity, dual ports and dual storage controllers for redundancy.”

“We also have Dell/EMC SAN storage, and we chose it because of its modular design for upgrading components as we need them,” Wetzel points out. “We like the LUN migration tools, which enable us to effectively solve customers’ performance requirements with no downtime to their applications. Typically our customers choose our Dell/EMC SAN storage solution because it provides the availability and performance needed for high-volume database transactions.”

A SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP

Another important component of Rackspace’s relationship with Dell is its ProSupport contract.¹ With Dell ProSupport for IT, the company gets access to expert technical support, from basic troubleshooting to complex problem-solving, plus direct access to Dell Global Command Centers. Rackspace also takes advantage of Dell ProSupport’s fast-track parts dispatch feature, which gives IT staff the flexibility to “skip the scripts” and dispatch parts and/or labor without having to go through scripted phone troubleshooting.

“Dell ProSupport definitely simplifies things,” Smykay says. “It gives us a single point of escalation for any issues with our gear, and frees us from having to worry about so many things.”

HOW IT WORKS

HARDWARE

- Dell™ PowerVault™ MD3000 modular disk array
- Dell/EMC CLARiiON CX and CX3 line of mid-range storage arrays

SOFTWARE

- Dell Modular Disk Storage Manager

SERVICES

- Dell ProSupport Enterprise-Wide Contract

“We also get monthly reports from our Service Delivery Manager that allow us to track the number of part failures per location broken down per month,” adds Smykay. “This allows us to get a better understanding of how we can improve our internal processes for parts replacement as well as track any potential or future risks to our storage environment.”

Other reports from the Dell ProSupport Enterprise-Wide Contract alert Rackspace engineers to incidents such as when and how disks are failing, helping them analyze, predict and even prevent problems. Dell ProSupport also provides Web-based visibility into where parts are coming from and what labor is needed onsite.

“Our Dell Service Delivery Manager is awesome,” Smykay continues. “It’s really phenomenal the way he can anticipate our needs and help us handle them more efficiently. Dell ProSupport has been nothing but a positive experience for us. That kind of support is unusual to find in a vendor.”

Rackspace should know. The company has a goal of providing “Fanatical Support”[®] to its customers—a commitment to do whatever it takes to fix their problem. “Receiving that same level of support ourselves makes it a lot easier to support our customers,” says Smykay.

DOING BUSINESS PERSON-TO-PERSON

This kind of close vendor relationship is important for Rackspace, says CTO John Engates. “Sometimes competing hardware vendors feel like big, impersonal companies when we deal with them. But Dell feels like a small company. They do business the way we do business—person-to-person. We like having quick access to Dell technical people. If we’re stuck on something, we can make a call any time and get an answer very quickly. Bottom line, our customers trust Dell, and we do too.”

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