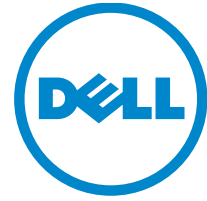


# Driving Force reclaims 13 hours per week for its staff of 8 and accelerates time to market for new functionality nine-fold



- Database Management/Utilities
- Desktop/Laptop Refresh
- Services



"Dell has simplified my life so that I can focus on developing new products for our customers."

*Josh Stevenson, Partner,  
Driving Force*

## Customer Profile

Company:	Driving Force
Industry:	Hosting Solutions
Country:	United States
Employees:	8
Web:	<a href="http://www.drivingforceauto.com">www.drivingforceauto.com</a>

## Business Need

Driving Force needed to move its Web hosting services to a new server in a colocation center, and it wanted to reduce staff time spent addressing client computer issues by standardizing on high-quality workstations running Microsoft® Windows® 7.

## Solution

The company migrated its Web hosting to Dell™ PowerEdge™ servers supported by a Dell PowerVault™ network attached storage (NAS) device, then rolled out Dell Precision™ workstations running Windows 7 to all employees.

## DRIVING FORCE

### Benefits

- 9-fold acceleration in time to market for new site functionality
- 4 hours/week reclaimed for IT administrator through simplified workstation administration
- 1 hour/week reclaimed for IT administrator through simplified hardware purchase and deployment
- 8 hours/week reclaimed for other employees
- Unplanned server downtime eliminated
- Seamless transition of end users to Microsoft Windows 7
- Simplified online customization of computers during purchase process

Most business at car dealerships is still conducted through face-to-face negotiations, but Driving Force is helping dealers merge onto the information superhighway. The Houston firm develops, manages and hosts Web sites for auto dealerships, many of which previously paid little attention to their Internet presence.

“What I like most about our current environment is that I don’t have to think about it.”

*Josh Stevenson, Partner,  
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“Some dealers want to keep certain information, such as price, to themselves until they have a conversation with the customer,” explains Josh Stevenson, partner with Driving Force. “But before someone browsing your Web site becomes a prospective buyer in the showroom, information is king. Dealers need to take advantage of Internet technologies in order to bring customers into the showroom—especially in a challenging economy.”

The sites Driving Force develops enable visitors to save vehicle searches for later reference and receive notifications when certain cars hit inventory or have price changes. The firm also provides a widget that enables site visitors to make offers on cars they see online.

### Systems Need A Trade-In

Driving Force has become a market innovator by optimally leveraging Web technologies for its customers. Nevertheless, only a few years ago the company was running its own business on a mixed infrastructure that made IT management difficult. For development, the company used white-box machines that Stevenson built himself.

“We had wild variations in the processor grade and memory of our systems,” Stevenson explains. “We were running a variety of operating systems and multiple versions of every application. I am both a developer and the systems admin, and that dual role was really frustrating in our former environment.”

A well-known hosting provider managed the Web server that hosted Driving Force customer sites. “We had a dedicated server there, but I just didn’t have enough control,” Stevenson says. “I wanted the peace of mind of knowing that I could literally hit the power button on my own box if I needed to.”

### Eliminating Unplanned Downtime

Stevenson decided to address the server situation by buying new machines and housing them in a colocation center. He wanted to customize the servers, but he also wanted to purchase them from a reputable vendor that could provide ongoing, dependable support. As he began pricing servers, he was discouraged by usability problems with some vendors’ Web sites.

“I’m a builder of Web sites,” Stevenson says, “so the quality of a front end matters to me. I appreciate that Dell’s site is attractive and has an intuitive interface that simplifies the customization of machines.” He initially

### Technology at Work

#### Services

Dell™ Support Services

#### Hardware

Dell PowerEdge™ R200 servers with Intel® Xeon® processors

Dell PowerEdge 2950 servers with Intel Xeon processors

Dell PowerVault™ NF500 network attached storage device

Dell Precision™ T5500 workstations with Intel Xeon 5500 series processors

Dell Remote Access Controllers (DRAC)

#### Software

Microsoft® .NET Framework

Microsoft SQL Server® 2005

Microsoft Visual Studio® 2008

Microsoft Windows® 7

Microsoft Windows Server® 2008

purchased Dell PowerEdge 2950 servers with Intel Xeon processors to run the Microsoft SQL Server 2005 databases that support Driving Force customer Web sites, and another Dell PowerEdge system with Intel Xeon processors to act as a Web server.

"I first chose Dell because of their Web site, but I was pleased with the entire purchase process," Stevenson says. "My sales rep was extremely helpful in making sure I got what I wanted. I used to build boxes myself so that I could be specific about the RAM or the processor. But it's a time savings to be able to configure the computer without having to build it yourself. I'm saving about an hour a week, on average, because of Dell's simplified purchase and deployment process."

As its hosting business has grown, Driving Force has added more Dell PowerEdge servers to its fleet, including Dell PowerEdge R200 servers with Intel Xeon processors. For storage, Driving Force relies on a Dell PowerVault NF500 network attached storage (NAS) device that runs serial ATA (SATA) disks. The PowerVault NF500 comes pre-loaded with features that promote highly efficient data storage and protection. It is optimized for file sharing, a focus which minimizes unnecessary functionality—and cost.

"Prior to implementing the Dell servers, we would sometimes have unplanned downtime," says Stevenson. "The longest stretch of continuous unplanned downtime that I could unequivocally attribute to the system was 14 hours—which is a lifetime on the Web. We have experienced no unplanned downtime at all since rolling out the Dell servers."

Because the Dell equipment is so reliable, Stevenson can perform most system administration tasks remotely using Dell Remote Access Controller (DRAC) cards installed in the servers. "Every once in a while, we'll do something that requires me to be on premises in the colocation facility, but for the most part I manage the servers remotely," he says.

### **Windows 7 Shaves Months Off Deployment**

Once he had the company's Web servers on cruise control, Stevenson turned his attention to client machines.

"When I built client systems myself, I didn't pay much attention to consistency," he says. "As our company grew, managing the clients took more and more of my time. On average, it probably took four hours a week, but sometimes I had to spend an entire week trying to rescue some box from the brink of death. I couldn't accurately budget my development time because I never knew what sys admin task might come up."

Because IT administration duties diverted Stevenson from software development, the unreliable client computers were slowing the release of new functionality to Driving Force customers. In addition, employees would try to solve problems themselves before bothering Stevenson, so they also spent time dealing with computer issues. Overall, the company was losing about 12 hours a week of staff time as a result of the old machines.

The white boxes' sluggish speed was further impacting productivity. For instance, Stevenson explains, "Microsoft Visual Studio on the Microsoft .NET Framework treats Web sites as if they're applications that have to be compiled. So when you're working on debugging, you do a lot of compiling. You try a fix, then recompile the library, then try something else, then recompile. With the old workstations, compiling consumed a lot of our developers' time. Little things like that start to have a tremendous effect when they're multiplied over the course of a work week."

Standardizing employees on high-quality workstations became a top priority. Once again, Stevenson turned to Dell. Driving Force bought eight Dell Precision T5500 workstations with Intel Xeon 5500 series processors. "We configured the systems from the ground up to be identical, running Windows 7," Stevenson says. "If I had it to do over again, I would buy exactly the same systems."

Before rolling out the new computers, Stevenson worried that end users might have trouble with the upgrade to a new operating system. He expected user training to delay the rollout by at least two months, but Windows 7 proved to be so user-friendly that his fear was unfounded. "Nobody missed a beat—and we had people moving from a

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*Josh Stevenson, Partner,  
Driving Force*

variety of operating systems," he says. "Standardizing on Windows 7 greatly sped up our deployment of the new machines."

### **Reclaiming 12 Hours A Week**

Since deployment, the company has continued to realize remarkable productivity gains. Windows 7 simplifies searches for files, applications and control panel settings, Stevenson reports. The operating system similarly simplifies creation of toolbars for quick launch of applications.

"The ease with which you can make toolbars is really improved in Windows 7," Stevenson says. "I now have two quick-launch toolbars—one for my remote desktop sessions to my servers and one for applications that I use frequently. They expedite my workflow and keep my taskbar tidy."

Better yet from an IT administrator's perspective, Windows 7 is stable and secure. "Windows 7 is a great operating system," Stevenson says. "I never have to think about the operating system anymore; it's working perfectly. Having reliable hardware running a solid operating system has been a real relief. Now I spend no time at all on client administration—which means the Dell workstations, together with Windows 7, are saving four hours a week for me personally and about eight hours a week for other people on staff."

### **Nine-Fold Acceleration In Time To Market**

The speed of the hardware has further increased employees' productivity. "Our

new Dell Precision workstations are incredibly fast," Stevenson says. "With the Intel Xeon 5500 series processors, the workstations compile Visual Studio code so quickly. I can't remember the last time I had to wait on my code to compile. If I want to debug something, I just do it."

The entire development team is benefiting. "The last major Web site feature we developed before the hardware upgrade took four people three months," Stevenson says. "We're about to release three features of comparable size, with the same four people, and start-to-finish development time for all three is about a month. So we're seeing a nine-fold acceleration in our time to market for new functionality."

### **Outstanding Support, To Boot**

The new computers are so reliable that Driving Force has taken advantage of Dell Support Services only once—and Stevenson was impressed by the experience. "We had an issue with a hard drive in one of our workstations," he says. "I called Dell Support Services, and they walked me through diagnosing the problem. I was on the call at 2 p.m. one day, and by 10 a.m. the next day, a new hard drive had arrived."

Despite the fast turnaround, Stevenson is happy not to need support more often. "Although Dell support has been great and the systems are solid, what I like most about our current environment is that I don't have to think about it," he says. "Dell has simplified my life so that I can focus on developing new products for our customers."



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