

CHANNEL SUCCESS STORY

Managed Services

In the Managed Services market, absence truly makes the heart grow fonder: And it does wonders for the bottom line as well. What we mean is this: The less often the MSP has to see its customer and be on site to do repairs, the more profitable it can be. B Resource, an MSP based in the Houston area, has taken this concept to the ultimate extreme. B Resource manages all of the IT operations for most of its customers and it handles nearly 8,000 users in all—in locations all around the world—with a total of only four technicians. Hal Brumfield, B Resource’s founder and president, says the secret is in using standardized hardware, specifically Dell servers and laptops using Intel vPro technology; standardized software, such as VMware for virtualization; plus a dash of its own proprietary processes and technologies. This Channel Success Story gives you insight into how B Resource has been able to grow its business without growing its staff, and it provides practical advice and guidance from a company that has achieved spectacular results.

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Case Study: B Resource

By Al Perlman

When Hal Brumfield founded B Resource in 2001, he had a clear mission: To manage all of his customers' IT operations from one location. When he first started out, with a couple of customers and perhaps dozens of users, it seemed like a reasonable expectation. But now his company has grown dramatically to about 100 customers with nearly 8,000 users in all.

Is it still reasonable for Brumfield to expect that B Resource can manage all of those customers and all of those users—in locations all around the world—from one central location?

Absolutely, says Brumfield, who, in addition to founding B Resource, is president of the company, which is based in the Houston area.

In fact, Brumfield says, B Resource goes beyond managed services and, instead, functions as the entire IT staff for almost all of its customers. What makes this feat even more impressive is that B Resource manages all of these customers, and all of these users, in all of these locations, with just four technicians.

"We're a managed services provider, but a lot more than just that," Brumfield says. "We are the entire IT staff for almost all of our clients. I've designed this from Day One to do everything sitting in one spot. We can reload the operating system on a laptop in Europe sitting here at our desk in Houston."

Brumfield says B Resource is able to accomplish these things by being focused on using standardized products such as Dell hardware built with Intel vPro technology; on using standardized software such as VMware for virtualization; and by adding in a dash of its own proprietary processes and technologies.

"Working through Dell and Intel technologies we are able to support 2,000 users with a single technician," Brumfield says. "We can do this because we've standardized on things to the nth degree. We can maintain and manage that many users with very few problems. Our clients don't have many issues and I attribute that completely to the technology from Dell and Intel and the way in which we use them."

Brumfield strongly believes that one of the critical components enabling B Resource to operate so efficiently is the vPro technology from Intel, which is available on Dell desktops and laptops. Computers with vPro can be accessed remotely even if they are turned off or if the operating system is corrupt.

"Under the old way of doing things, most companies would leave their machines on overnight so we could run updates and security patches. With Dell and (Intel) vPro we can schedule the machines to power on, do whatever they have to do, and power off."

"Say there's a person with a laptop in a hotel room halfway around the world and his system crashes," Brumfield says. "We can get that system back up the way it was prior to the crash. With Intel vPro we are able to get remote BIOS-level access to the machine. That's the start of it. Once we have BIOS-level access we have access to the backup and can get the machine up and running and reload the backup."

This works because systems with vPro technology leave the NIC powered on in a low-power state when the rest of the system is turned off. The NIC continuously checks to determine if the management console is trying to access it. When systems have vPro, the management console accesses the system through the TCP/IP stack in the firmware instead of going through the operating system. This means the system can be remotely managed independent of the operating system.

Brumfield says one of the keys to being able to remotely manage many users with only a few technicians is to standardize on everything. For example, one of B Resource's larger customers is a construction company in the Houston area with about 10 offices throughout the state and almost 1,000 users.

"We have designed a standard for desktop hardware and laptops that we deploy to all of the offices. Whether its an executive or a person out in the field – they all get the same configuration all the way down to the memory stick on the board," Brumfield says. "This makes it much simpler to manage everything remotely.

"If you break it down, what are the challenges of remote support?" Brumfield asks. "One, both sides need an Internet connection. Two, you need to get access to work on the remote machines, to boot them up and get them functioning with some sort of Internet connectivity. Intel vPro allows us to get access to the machines and a combination of Dell OpenManage and our own proprietary software enables us to get the machines functioning properly, with all of their files and software and backup."

As a Managed Services Provider, the approach that B Resource has taken to remote management and outsourcing of IT has resulted in a variety of benefits, including:

1. Improved performance, reliability and scalability for its customers.
2. Much less downtime for customers.
3. Quicker response time for B Resource, resulting in tremendous cost savings in time, travel and personnel.

In addition, by partnering with Dell, B Resource has been able to dramatically cut its own costs by:

1. Purchasing hardware that offers better price/performance points than competitive offerings.
2. Using Dell's PartnerDirect program to enhance and strengthen its own ability to provide value-added services to its customers.
3. Dramatically reducing the amount of power consumed by its equipment through the use of the Intel vPro technology in the Dell computers.

Brumfield offers the following example to illustrate the importance of reducing downtime for customers, as well as in cutting response time for the MSP:

"Imagine you've got a laptop or a desktop that goes to a blue screen. It's located 500 miles away," Brumfield says. "For most people the options are to box it up, ship it here, let us fix it, and we'll ship it back. Under the best case, they ship it Monday, we fix it Tuesday, they get it back on Wednesday. That's three days they're down.

"Otherwise, we can send someone on a plane or in a car to go repair it and that can take the better part of a day, at least, and it's expensive. With Dell running vPro we connect to the machine remotely and we can generally repair the problem and get the machine back and running within an hour – without having to hire an additional tech. That makes for a much faster response time."

Brumfield is equally enthused about the potential cost savings in reduced power that are enabled by the vPro technology and Dell hardware.

"Under the old way of doing things, most companies would leave their machines on overnight so we could run updates and security patches," Brumfield says. "With Dell and vPro we can schedule the machines to power on, do whatever they have to do, and power off. Instead of running 24/7 for 365 days a year, maybe these machines are now running 10 hours a day, five days a week, and maybe we run updates once a day, which is stretching it. So you're looking at 60 hours a week as opposed to 168 hours a week."

Brumfield attributes part of B Resource's success to its long-term relationship with Dell. When B Resource began, it was a customer of Compaq, but after a year or so decided to give Dell a chance. At the time, the decision was based primarily on price and performance.

"Whenever you're dealing with the small business market, price makes a difference," Brumfield says. "Along with better pricing, we've always received just as good or better service."

That service has improved markedly, Brumfield says, in the past several months since B Resource joined Dell's PartnerDirect program as a Certified Dell Partner in June, 2008. PartnerDirect is the partner program Dell launched in December 2007 to help formalize its relationship with partners and to beef up the ways in which Dell supports partners through marketing, financing, training and certification programs. Brumfield says he's always been happy with Dell, but he can also see a different attitude and approach since Dell launched PartnerDirect.

"I've been working with Dell for seven years and I can see the transition," Brumfield says. "Before, we were just another client: They sold us hardware. Now, we've got this whole channel team really involved in our business when we need them. We've got guys from Dell who come to us with just a couple of hours notice to help us with our clients.

"That construction company I was talking about: We recently did a migration from a stand-alone server environment to a virtual environment with VMware, Dell servers and an EqualLogic SAN," Brumfield adds. "Dell sent down a group of guys to assist us with that migration. The migration itself only took two days—there was a lot of

planning and talking before that. It was a real relief to me to have that support. I feel more involved now that we're part of their channel partner program—I feel like I have an extension of B Resource in Dell."

For Brumfield, this mission that began in 2001 has turned into a reality he never quite envisioned blossoming this fruitfully. On November 7, The Houston Business Journal named B Resource as one of its Fast Tech 50, recognizing the Houston area's 50 fastest growing technology companies.

Brumfield is willing to share credit with his technology partners, but only to a point. "I attribute a lot of our success to the standardization and processes that we've put in place," he says. "And the Dell and Intel technologies have certainly helped."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Al Perlman *has been writing about the channel since the late 1970s (sad, but true). He was the founding editorial director of both CRN and VARBusiness. More recently he was involved in the launches of the Web sites MSP Mentor and The VAR Guy, and in the publications TechIQ and Smart Partner.*

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Dell Inc. (NASDAQ: DELL) listens to partners and customers to deliver innovative technology and services they trust and value. Via PartnerDirect, Dell's new partner program, channel partners can leverage Dell's business model to operate more profitably and efficiently, as well as to gain access to the cutting-edge technology that has made Dell the #1 choice for business systems globally. We are committed to our channel business and through PartnerDirect, our goal is to create lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with solution providers. Dell's goal for partners: less complexity, more value. For more information on PartnerDirect and to register in the program, please visit www.dell.com/partner. We hope that you'll join us.

About Intel

At Intel, we believe in innovation. We're driven by it. We live by it. And it's this principle that led us to create the world's first microprocessor in 1971. We never stop looking for the next leap ahead—in technology, education, culture, manufacturing, and social responsibility. Intel's award-winning channel programs have led the industry for over ten years. Today, Intel is excited by the innovation and investments Dell has delivered to help Partners' grow their own businesses.