

Case Studies | Financial

Business Solutions Powered by DataCore™



Sherron Associates, Inc., a property management firm located in Bellevue, Washington, has embraced DataCore's SANmelody in order to revamp its existing storage infrastructure by re-purposing existing equipment and enabling redundancy of systems – thereby ensuring up-time. DataCore partner Moose Logic, a managed services provider and one of the nation's leading Citrix value-added resellers, is responsible for a SANmelody deployment that was done in conjunction with Citrix XenServer™. Sherron Associates is now reaping the benefits of virtualization technology by having deployed Citrix XenServer and DataCore SANmelody in tandem. In addition, the property management firm has recently been chosen as a “voice of the customer” for Citrix.

Sherron Associates, Inc. was founded in 1969 and is headquartered in Bellevue, Washington. The company is a property development, construction, and management firm with projects in Washington, Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico. Sherron Associates is a dynamic real estate investment company with a highly qualified and professional staff dedicated to creating solid value for its clients, managing assets with the highest integrity, while providing its residents with a quality living environment.

The Challenge – Making the Virtual Enterprise a Reality

At the start of 2008, Sherron Associates was at a point where all of its equipment (with the exception of two servers) was well over five years old and was becoming increasingly problematic. According to Gayle Spencer, network administrator, Sherron Associates, “going virtual” with Citrix XenServer and DataCore SANmelody was the most practical thing for the firm to do because it could cost-effectively virtualize and consolidate their storage resources and its entire server farm, consisting of seven servers, onto just two servers – using XenServer and SANmelody – as opposed to purchasing five or six brand new hardware platforms.

“We had one XenServer installed by Moose Logic in January to begin our migration and a second XenServer installed a week and a half later along with a DataCore powered SAN,” said Spencer. “SANmelody made it easy to set up a high-availability SAN to support our move from an aging server farm to new XenServer-based systems. Moreover, we were able to re-purpose existing hardware to run the SAN simply by purchasing some additional hard drives. The DataCore SAN just works and provides peace of mind that my system is secure. It does absolutely everything that it should and makes things far more simple and flexible. I love that I don't have to think about it.”

Moose Logic has worked with Sherron Associates for over ten years, where they started solving business problems for this and other clients with Citrix technology. Sherron is a classic small-to-midsize enterprise (SME) with approximately forty users. These users are supported by wide-area network (WAN) links to branch facilities in several western states. The old network environment was traditional – encompassing single workloads on physical machines, essentially running Microsoft Active Directory. There was a mix of Windows 2003 and Windows 2000 servers. In addition to Active Directory, Sherron has Exchange 2003, and a pair of Citrix Presentation Servers on Windows 2000 platforms.

The old network encompassed no SAN technology, just a small NAS for data storage. In addition, there were two physical servers running Citrix, which boosted the performance of business applications over the WAN. A property management application that is mission-critical to running Sherron's business was the major concern for partner and customer alike during the transition from the old network to the virtual infrastructure. It was imperative that any new system extended the life of that application, because the cost of replacing it is quite high.

The Solution – DataCore SANmelody and Citrix XenServer

“Our discussions with Sherron prior to DataCore centered around the age of their systems – with the goal of formulating a go-forward, cost-effective strategy to not only stabilize the system, but also to increase performance and improve manageability,” explained Steve Parlee, director of service, Moose Logic. “When we really thought about the challenges that Sherron Associates was confronting, virtualization played a key role. For example, we were able to do a physical to virtual conversion of a critical server running Yardi property management software in one evening without stepping foot on the customer's premises. Leveraging the power of Citrix XenServer Enterprise and DataCore SANmelody, we were able to log-in from a remote location, perform an online image backup of the Yardi server, and a few hours later restore that image into a Virtual Machine being executed on the XenServer from the DataCore SAN.”



Moose Logic was able to give the application that served as the nerve center for Sherron Associates new life on a brand new pair of super-fast servers running XenServer Enterprise. The next logical step was to further empower the pair of XenServers using DataCore SAN technology to provide flexibility, and to safely enable Sherron Associates system administrators to use advance functions like XenMotion, which makes it possible to move workloads around for high availability, best use of resources, and ease of operation. "It all worked out beautifully," said Scott Gorcester, founder, Moose Logic. "We had the challenge of preserving an old but valuable software application running on a worn-out system and not impact our client's business. Our solution provided the peace of mind of being able to take the existing server, unplug it and put it in the corner for safe keeping." Moose Logic was then able to tune, tweak and update the new version of the Yardi server running in virtual. After a few weeks of ensuring the virtual infrastructure was successful, Gorcester and his team were able to completely decommission the old server.

The virtual infrastructure tandem of XenServer and DataCore has meant that Sherron Associates and other Moose Logic clients have been able to improve the performance and resiliency of their systems and dramatically lower energy and hardware costs, all by leveraging virtualization technology and utilizing repurposed servers to power a DataCore SAN. The other thing Sherron Associates has done within their environment is to image all of their servers. Network administrators can now store the images on the SAN, and if needed they can pull the image from one, two or three weeks ago, etc. This speeds up the repair time for whatever occurred.

Moose Logic and Sherron Associates plan on adding a second SANmelody SAN to enable synchronous replication and, as the budget allows, may eventually purchase a third SAN to power a business continuity solution using DataCore's asynchronous replication for disaster recovery to an offsite SANmelody server. While administrators could restore from images and bring them up on local storage, the fact remains that a server failure could take out the SAN and bring down all the virtual machines (VM's) with it. To ward against that, this system provides a powerful foundation that can be extended to provide levels of protection that, until now, have only been afforded to larger enterprises. "For us, the Citrix XenServer and DataCore SANmelody combination gives us redundancy that we did not have before," explained Spencer. "Before, we were dependent on the piece of hardware our systems were running on and if the hardware failed, we would have to go out and immediately buy new hardware to replace that specific piece of equipment."

The Results – Meeting Business Objectives and Realizing Tangible Benefits

In terms of realized benefits, Spencer notes that by going virtual, the three new Citrix Presentation Servers are working better due to the fact that they are load-balanced – meaning that there are fewer demands placed on the three servers than there were when they had just two Presentation Servers deployed. The domain controllers are also running in a virtualized capacity. Should one of the XenServers develop a problem, the virtual machines can be easily moved to an unaffected XenServer until the problem is fixed.

"By putting our system in a XenServer environment where it is flexible, where the processors are new, and where the system is faster, things have just greatly improved," added Spencer. From a financial perspective, for Sherron Associates any other solution would have been much more expensive and would not have provided the cost savings benefits of virtualization to both servers and storage. "Without the Citrix XenServer and DataCore combination, we would not have been able to afford to consolidate our servers and install a SAN to protect our storage," explained Spencer. "At best, we would have had to replace at least a few of our existing, older servers at a cost of \$8,000 - \$10,000, each."

The Bottom Line – Citrix and DataCore are a "Dynamic Duo"

Moose Logic has already won a half dozen new Citrix and DataCore virtualization customers, including Sherron Associates, Douglas County, Digital Control and Integra Pacific Mortgage. Currently between Moose Logic itself and its clients, the new DataCore partner already has over twenty production XenServers installed and running. "DataCore and Citrix XenServer are a logical combination for anyone going virtual and best of all, customers get it immediately once they see it in action," commented Gorcester. "Strategically, I see DataCore accelerating our server virtualization sales cycles as well as becoming the storage virtualization vendor on which we can build our Citrix XenServer practice into a 'Total Enterprise Virtualization' practice."

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