

FLUID DATA STORAGE FINDS A HOME AT WHERETOLIVE.COM

Today's home buyers expect up-to-date information at their fingertips. Online listings and virtual home tours opened the door for a more proactive shopper, as time-crunched buyers seek their dream houses from their desktops. In response, real estate brokers have boosted their Web presence beyond basic listings to include mortgage calculators, property value estimators and neighborhood profiles. To make these tools a reality, brokers often rely on WhereToLive.com to help them manage the behind the scenes applications, so agents can focus their efforts on providing expert counsel to their clients.

Led by experienced industry players, WhereToLive.com has built a comprehensive suite of Web-based productivity tools for lead generation, listing distribution, contact management, online marketing and more. Agents receive an end-to-end online presence, from a managed website to support for wireless devices.

LEAVING THE LIMITATIONS OF TRADITIONAL STORAGE

Supporting the increasing number of more-detailed listings created some unique storage management and scalability challenges for WhereToLive.com. Not long ago, the two-person IT team manually managed terabytes of digital images—held in millions of tiny files—that changed each time a property was listed, changed or sold. Backups were taxing and failed to catch all of any given day's changes.

In the competitive realty market, where time is of the essence, high availability and quick data recovery can be the difference between a cold listing and a closing. "Reliability can turn a listing into a sale," says Ben Higginbotham, director of new technology at WhereToLive.com. "With increasing data and a highly competitive market, we needed a way to protect customer data in case of an outage."

Unpredictable growth made properly sizing the company's storage a guessing game, one that didn't mesh well with the company's legacy storage area network (SAN). "We're talking about millions, if not trillions of files, and some of these houses are on the market; some of them aren't," says Higginbotham. "So it didn't make sense to buy another solution that doesn't scale, that's not fluid, that doesn't allow me to move these pictures, these images, this data into different types of hard drives."

Higginbotham began assessing more flexible, easy-to-use SANs to revitalize the company's storage infrastructure. A demonstration of the Compellent® Storage Center™ SAN convinced him that he had found his answer. "When I saw the interface, my jaw dropped," he explains. "You could just see it. You looked at that and you went, that makes sense."

A disk failure or accidental deletion with the legacy SAN left WhereToLive.com with limited recovery options. With Compellent, Higginbotham feels secure that his clients are protected. "Agents are busy—and no one wants a slipup to cost a realtor a million-dollar sale," says Higginbotham. "With Compellent, we've radically improved recovery time."



"With Fluid Data technology I have the ability to store infinitely more data at a price that's actually reasonable. If I were to build the same SAN with all tier-one storage drives, I couldn't afford it. But by using this dynamic technology, I can build the smartest system that automatically uses the right storage at the right time."

BEN HIGGINBOTHAM
WhereToLive.com

RESULTS

- » Replays protect client data and allow recovery of lost files in minutes
- » Boot from SAN speeds provisioning process for new servers from as much as eight hours to only minutes
- » Automated Tiered Storage identifies 90 percent of data as inactive and migrates it to low-cost storage, delaying disk costs
- » Modular Compellent architecture provides the flexibility to scale storage alongside business growth

OPERATING SYSTEMS

- » Microsoft® Windows® Server

APPLICATIONS

- » VMware® ESX Server, Microsoft Exchange Server 2003, Microsoft SQL Server® 2005



UNPRECEDENTED EASE OF USE

Compellent's industry-leading ease of use has been heralded by industry experts and customers alike. Storage Center's simple sophistication played a major role in Higginbotham's decision to select Compellent.

"With Compellent, it's not just the numbers. It's the entire experience. It's making sure that your data moves wherever you need it to move. It's making sure that the interface is easy enough for any IT guy off the street to be able to walk up to it and use it in ten minutes. I can't do that with any other SAN. It's almost like a work of art in storage."

Data Instant Replay™ uses Compellent's continuous snapshots, called Replays, to recover lost data in a matter of seconds. Because Replays capture only block-level changes, backups no longer necessitate arduous, constant tape-based processes. "I can take as many Replays as any server needs without impacting the speed and performance our customers expect," adds Higginbotham.

Compellent's Boot from SAN technology provides further redundancy and drastically shortens server provisioning time. The Server Instant Replay™ intuitive wizard automates the entire process, allowing Higginbotham to provision or recover servers with just a few clicks. "I used to spend as much as eight hours setting up a new box, and now I can set up four or more in under ten minutes," he explains. "I can point a golden image on the SAN to new hardware, so customers are covered should a server have an issue."

WhereToLive.com also got an unexpected boost to its development environment. By creating a Replay of a live server and then mounting it to a development server, developers can work with actual data without risking the live environment. "Our developers aren't guessing, which saves us time and money," says Higginbotham. "We've gained flexibility, ultimately improving the quality, speed and stability of our end product."

of high-speed Fibre Channel storage while aging data automatically migrates to lower-cost SATA drives. Because data changes with each transaction, nearly 90 percent of WhereToLive.com's data rapidly moves to the bottom tier—without any intervention.

"The data we didn't use just slid right on down. No one noticed anything," says Higginbotham. "But now I have the ability to store infinitely more data at a price that's actually reasonable. If I were to build that same SAN with all tier-one storage or solid-state hard drives, I couldn't. I couldn't afford it."

SINGLE SYSTEM SCALES WITHOUT LIMITS

Adopting the Compellent SAN has given WhereToLive.com superior scalability to evolve its storage environment alongside the business. Compellent's modular architecture lets Higginbotham add capacity, connectivity and performance incrementally. With Compellent, he can choose the technologies that make sense for WhereToLive.com's infrastructure today, without fear of technology lock-in." I've never liked to be told what my limits are," says Higginbotham. "With Compellent, I've gained the freedom to add whatever I want to add." Also, he'll be ready to meet rapidly increasing storage needs when a new broker signs on, because the system can grow from one to hundreds of terabytes without a forklift upgrade.

"With the Compellent system, we purchased it with the intent of growing, so I'm able to get a million-dollar SAN over time and without that one-time million-dollar capital expenditure. I build it up over time because I don't need it right away, but I'm going to need it in three years, so I build into it as my business needs grow."

INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION SAVES MANAGEMENT AND MONEY

By taking advantage of Automated Tiered Storage on the Compellent SAN, the company has delayed disk purchases for more than a year. With a Fluid Data architecture, frequently used information, such as new or popular listings, resides on the top tier



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CSWTL021610