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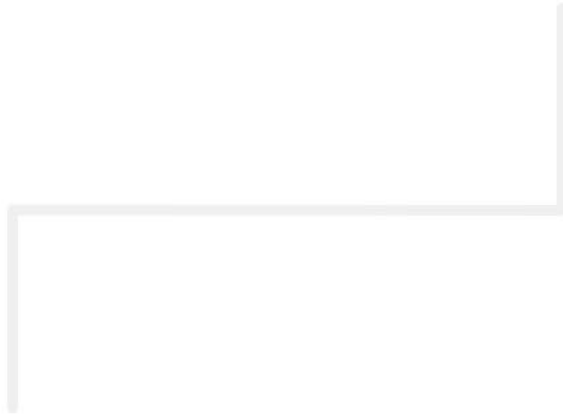
Adapting to Stay Ahead: A Data Center Refresh

Davenport Group helps Nor-AM stay agile and responsive for their customers by refreshing their data center.

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The Story

"Warehousing is where our story began," said Greg Brandt, CEO of Nor-AM, a cold storage and refrigeration industry leader. "We adapted to stay ahead of the shifting marketplace. Now whether you're looking for truckload storage, or a specialty case picking operation, we can handle it."

Twenty years ago, Nor-AM opened with 12 employees and one warehouse in Le Mars, Iowa. Today, owners Greg and Janna Brandt work with a team of 300 with 32 locations in four states. And the building? It's now several buildings covering 25 million square feet.

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Greg and Janna lead the company as CEO and CFO, respectively. Now with the second generation joining them, they are confident their family-focused culture and policy, *Do what you say you're going to do,* will grow for years to come.

The Opportunity

Twenty-five million square feet of real estate is *a lot* of density. You could fit 90 Super Domes or 115 St. Peter's Basilicas inside that space. This large foot print across multiple states speaks to Nor-AM's rapid and exciting growth. By working hard to anticipate and respond to the needs of their customers, Nor-AM continues to adapt to stay ahead of the market. To build on this success, Nor-AM needed an IT partner with equal agility.

Before meeting Davenport Group, Nor-AM leveraged internal disks on servers to run their virtual environment. This created a bottleneck even when they added SSDs to the servers. Nor-AM experienced constant performance issues with their SQL database. When a server went down, several virtual machines went down as well. To bring a VM back up on another server was a time consuming and manual task where end users and applications experienced significant down time. The high availability Nor-AM prided themselves on in their daily business was missing from their IT environment.

Looking to correct these issues, Nor-AM reached out to Davenport Group. With a similar all-in focus on responding to customer needs with care and efficiency, Nor-AM saw the agile and responsive IT partner they were looking for in Davenport Group.

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The Solution

In early planning meetings, Nor-AM shared with Davenport Group their need for a highly available data center to serve their 32 locations across the US. This new IT infrastructure also needed to add the same solution at a separate location for disaster recovery. To start the design process, Davenport Group ran a free virtualization assessment to review with Nor-AM. Davenport Group engineers sized a solution based on the assessment and future growth expectations to ensure Nor-AM had a scalable solution that would meet their needs and their customer's needs.

Nor-AM and Davenport Group worked together on a solution to replace their existing infrastructure with new highly available technology that will allow them to grow. We also implemented a second site to enable disaster recovery when they need it. This solution consisted of Dell EMC Servers, Dell EMC SC Hybrid Storage Array, Microsoft Windows Server, and Davenport Group implementation services. This comprehensive upgrade provided Nor-AM with a redundant and responsive virtual infrastructure to operate their business, and to ensure there are no single points of failure that could cause unplanned down time. With the data center refresh designed collaboratively with Davenport Group engineers, Nor-AM's IT environment became more efficient, available, and adaptable.

The Result

Nor-AM's very first customer, Wells' Dairy in Le Mars, is still their customer today. This shows how much they focus on cultivating strong relationships. Further, they are working towards zero landfill for some of their warehouses. Nor-AM also stays up to date with new innovations, implementing technologies like battery-driven carts, the latest in conveyors, and heated cabs on fork lifts. These values and best practices have created the successful and growing business they have today.

Establishing a best practice framework for essential IT architecture is another important aspect of successful companies. In Nor-AM's case, clustering servers and consolidating storage streamlines the management of storage and allows applications to run even if a server goes down. It ensures applications and end users see the highest level of performance. The data center technology they implemented gives back time to their IT team to focus on new projects instead of maintaining siloed infrastructure.

Nor-AM's partnership with Davenport Group and their emphasis best practices in IT infrastructure will help their business grow well into the future. "With the critical factors involved in modernizing their data center, Nor-AM wanted a responsive and all-in partner to help them stay ahead of the technology curve," said BJ Bradley, Director of Engineering for Davenport Group. "The Dell EMC solutions implemented in this upgrade mean Nor-AM is ready for whatever comes their way."

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