

Casino hits jackpot with BladeSystem solution engineered by Vital Support Systems

HP partner gives Riverside Casino and Golf Resort reliable computing power with HP BladeSystem.



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–Jeff Sparling, CEO and Partner, Vital Support Systems

Objective:

Provide affordable, flexible, reliable and scalable IT solutions for SMB customers.

Approach:

Compact, energy-efficient, highly secure clustered server infrastructure using HP BladeSystem portfolio with HP ProLiant server blades, HP BladeSystem enclosures, HP StorageWorks SAN, HP storage and server management tools and VMware virtualization software

Business benefits:

- Improved customer service for a casino/resort through greater agility to add hospitality applications
- Faster progress towards meeting deadline to open resort, saving 50 person-days
- 50% reduction in IT administration costs

IT improvements:

- 99.99% uptime with clustered configuration
- Smaller, cooler data center reduces operating costs
- Single point of contact for servicing entire solution for quicker response
- Quicker, more proactive monitoring of system health
- Remote management tools streamline administration tasks
- Greater scalability for continued growth

If you build IT, they will come

Small and mid-sized businesses (SMB’s) have similar IT needs across industries. They want to offer sophisticated services such as remote access, real-time transaction processing, or rich media content, with high security, availability, uptime and the flexibility to scale their infrastructure quickly, as needs change. Yet, the cost of massive server or storage infrastructures, including the housing and power costs and a large specialized IT staff to install and service it, can be a challenge.

HP Partner Vital Support Systems understands these needs thoroughly. Based in Urbandale, Iowa, it has been helping SMB’s implement HP technology since 2001. It also offers managed services such as server and desktop management, disaster recovery, and regulatory compliance.

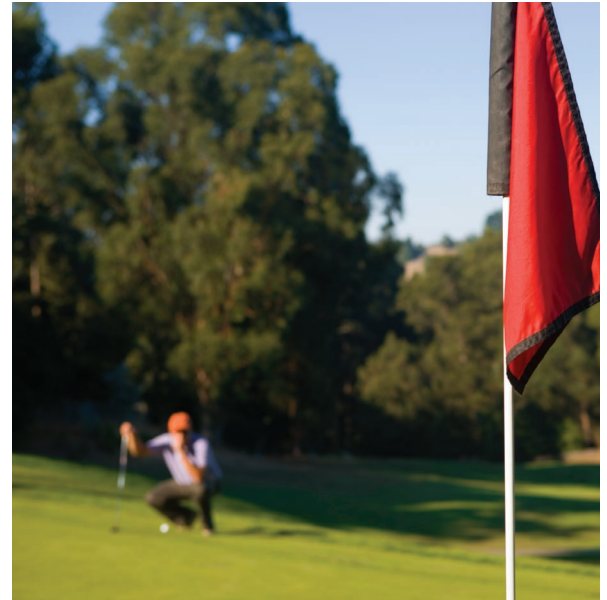
“HP has excellent technology to develop highly available and reliable application infrastructures, from the server products, including blade servers, to storage appliances and data management software,” says CEO and partner Jeff Sparling. “It’s a start-to-finish lineup that’s a very good fit for our customers.”

Vital has expanded its HP sales about 40 percent a year over the last four years with a proof-of-concept strategy. The company showcases its own and its partners' technologies at three demonstration centers in the Midwest running HP c-Class and p-Class BladeSystems, HP StorageWorks SANs, HP storage and server management tools (including Command View, Storage Essentials, Systems Insight Manager, Data Protector and Rapid Deployment Package), VMware server virtualization software and more.

"We don't necessarily say to our customers, 'If you run 15 blades, that's going to save you X dollars a month,'" says Mike Wohlenhaus, vice-president and partner at Vital. "Instead, we bring the people or customers who manage the systems into our demonstration center and let them touch and feel the blades. We show them how to deploy a blade in an enclosure, get them on an EVA so they can see how easy it is to deploy multiple virtual servers. Or we show them how HP Systems Insight Manager proactively delivers reports, so you can see what's about to fail and replace it proactively. We demonstrate how the Integrated Lights Out (iLO) feature can reboot a server remotely. Then we show them 15 customer sites where we've done something similar. They walk out convinced that this is a rock-solid solution."

Behind the scenes

One example of how the BladeSystem and VMware solution provides key behind-the-scenes support is at a new casino near Iowa City—the Riverside Casino and Golf Resort (RCGR), which includes



1200+ slot machines and table games, a 201-room hotel, a full-service spa, four restaurants, a show lounge, an 18-hole Rees Jones designed Championship Golf Course, and a 12,000 square foot Event Center. In early 2006, the casino had less than five months before opening day in which to design and implement an IT solution that would support a range of 24x7x365 guest services.

Vicki Mnayer, IT Manager at the casino, explains that while the gaming system is maintained by its original vendor, the slot machines tied to the gaming system—and everything else at RCGR—need to plug into a highly secure, stable network and server infrastructure.

"We were looking for no downtime; total disaster recovery capacities; very high security; centralized, remote systems management; and the ability to add more hospitality solutions, such as streaming live sports coverage to every slot machine on the gaming floor, Web-based hotel reservations, keeping track of repeat customers' preferences and even choreographing our feature bar's fountain lights-and-music display," Mnayer says.

Good enclosures make good neighbors

The infrastructure Vital brought to RCGR starts with 16 HP ProLiant server blades in an HP c7000 BladeSystem enclosure. VMware runs on two of the blades, separating them into 11 virtual servers. Other blades are clustered for failover protection, delivering 99.99 percent uptime. Multiple terabytes of online storage capacity are available by connecting an HP StorageWorks 4000 Enterprise Virtual Array storage disk array to the BladeSystem. Meanwhile, an HP StorageWorks MSL5026 tape library with Data Protector software provides backup data protection to comply with Iowa's strict reporting requirements for the gaming industry. Using HP Systems Insight Manager, Vital receives immediate and predictive notification of hardware failures and can proactively schedule driver updates.

Mnayer particularly appreciates the ability to create new virtual servers on the fly. For example, when a vendor showed up with a package of golf reservation software, RCGR's IT staff created a container for the new application in about 20 minutes using virtualization. Most businesses would have to wait a couple of weeks for a new server to be shipped and installed. "As a technology person, I can tell you it's just about the greatest feeling in the world not to have to disappoint your customer," says Mnayer.

Vital's turnkey solution was accelerated further with the help of HP Factory Express and HP Deployment services, which saved the casino's staff more than 50 person-days of installation. RCGR met its deadline with time to spare, and now depends on Vital Support for third-level support via managed services. "If it weren't for the quality and experience of Vital's engineering staff, I would have definitely been more concerned," Mnayer says. "But we opened on time, and everything worked just fine. Vital really does stand up with us to determine a solution so we're always up and running."

At a glance

Vital Support Systems, an HP Solution Provider with offices in Urbandale and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Omaha, Neb., Kansas City, Mo., and Moline, Ill., develops technology solutions for small and mid-sized businesses throughout the Midwest. It offers a complete package of services, including consulting, architecture, implementation, business continuity planning and hosting, outsourced systems and network management and server consolidation. Its solutions are based on HP BladeSystem technology and virtualization software from VMware.

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—Vicki Mnayer, IT Manager, Riverside Casino & Golf Resort

The highly stable and automated IT systems at Riverside Casino and Golf Resort have reduced ongoing IT operational costs by 50 percent. For example, the team spends much less time on routine tasks such as changing backup tapes or adding servers. Pleased by the success, Mnayer notes: "The HP infrastructure we have in place will support our growth for years. Vital helped us make the right choice."

Solution at a Glance

Hardware:

- 16 HP BladeSystem ProLiant server blades in HP c7000 enclosure
- HP StorageWorks 4000 Enterprise Virtual Array
- HP StorageWorks MSL5026 tape library

Software:

- HP Integrated Lights-Out (iLO)
- HP Systems Insight Manager
- HP Insight Control
- VMware V3.02

Operating System:

- Microsoft Windows Server 2003
- Windows 2000
- Red Hat Enterprise Linux

Network Protocol:

- TCP/IP
- 2GB fiber connectivity to servers

HP Services:

- HP Factory Express
- HP Deployment

Vital Support Systems Services:

Installation, training, documentation, ongoing third-level maintenance service

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