

VIRTUALIZATION SPECIAL

CIOReview

The Navigator for Enterprise Solutions

JUNE 27, 2016 CIOREVIEW.COM

IN MY OPINION

Mark Schlesinger,
CIO,
Broadridge Financial Solutions

Virtuozzo: Trailblazers of the Virtualization Movement



Rob Lovell,
CEO



#202, Fremont, CA-94538
44790, S Grimmer Blvd.
CIO REVIEW

Virtualization, Mobilization, and Automation

By **George K. Mehok**, CIO and **Scott Anderson**, AVP-Infrastructure, Safeguard Properties, LLC.



With constantly changing client requirements, a never ending quest to improve productivity through business process automation, and ever increasing information security requirements

How a mortgage field services provider transformed their IT operations to support growth, quality, and a rapidly changing business model. “Change is the Law of Life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” – John F. Kennedy

Safeguard Properties is the nation’s leading mortgage field services company providing an array of property inspections and maintenance services to the largest financial institutions in the U.S. These services are supported by a network of thousands of mobile field workers utilizing smartphones that are equipped with Safeguard’s own custom built apps. These apps enable Safeguard’s network to transmit millions of images and hundreds of gigabytes of data daily. This continuous stream of data is fed into Safeguard’s IT infrastructure, which is then connected to more than 100 mortgage banking clients.

In 2012, as a result of a major acquisition and business growth, Safeguard embarked on a plan to revolutionize their IT infrastructure, operations and application portfolio to optimize the speed of delivery, quality, and technological advances. Safeguard’s strategy was to invest in technology that would solve the needs of the present, while also creating a foundation for the future of the mobile field services business.

As a mortgage field services provider, Safeguard saw a rapid organic growth in the services provided. This was a result of the housing crisis, mixed with increased regulatory requirements and compliance controls. Safeguard utilized this opportunity to revamp their aging IT infrastructure into a state-of-the-art, automated environment, located in multiple new data center facilities. This transformation leveraged virtualization to optimize server hardware resources and capital spend, while giving the organization high availability and system movement flexibility for support and maintenance activities. “With the latest virtualization technologies, we were able to increase performance, while better utilizing our physical server infrastructure, and lowering our total costs,” states Adam Piechocinski, Virtualization and DevOps Manager, Safeguard.

Automation is another cornerstone of the Safeguard IT business transformation. Using automation tools, tightly integrated with virtualization environments, Safeguard was able to build thousands

of servers to support the new data center environments in just a few days. Safeguard's traditional build, patch, and deploy cycle previously consumed a minimum of five days where work would get passed back and forth between server admins, data center ops, network, storage and application build teams. Taking a virtualization and automation-only approach to new server builds, allowed Safeguard to build complete application environments in minutes. This automation approach also saw a significant decrease in errors, inconsistent builds, and variance between server classifications, which additionally led to a decrease in out ages for Safeguard's user population.

The fusion of Safeguard's automation and virtualization is also leveraged during patching cycles to patch and move systems throughout the data center environments, increasing availability and lowering patching windows from days to minutes. System agility in movements of applications with no user impact, has increased system availability to Safeguards clients, as well as to their network, all while giving Safeguard's virtualization engineers the ability to service and patch hardware during the work day.

This automation and virtualization combination is also carried forward with software deployments. With constantly changing client requirements, a never ending quest to improve productivity through business process automation, and ever increasing information security requirements, Safeguard has been able to transform its deployment process for mobile and client applications from an eight hour deployment to a five minute process. As mobile development is completed and passes through multiple layers of quality checks, the software is packaged and auto-deployed to multiple data center environments simultaneously. This formerly labor intense and manual process is now completed with just a few mouse clicks. Safeguard's mobile users are able to obtain patches, upgrades, and OS fixes for their Android and iOS applications much quicker and from multiple data centers around the country. This agility is the cornerstone of Safeguard's IT operations strategy. Leveraging automation, packaging, and DevOps concepts, the company has



Scott Anderson

been able to transform to a rapid response and near real-time change engine that supports many different application platforms.

“To remain relevant and support the real-time business change, IT organizations must adopt an ‘automation first’ and virtualization mindset. We live in a ‘speed of thought’ society, where real-time agility to address issues, deploy systems and transform business processes are what separates growing businesses from businesses that react,” stated Scott Anderson, Assistant Vice President of Infrastructure, Safeguard.

As IT leaders, we can not rely on monolithic servers, processes or workflows as a standard business practice anymore. With cost containment pressures, leaders must drive to virtualized, hybrid cloud-based environments which optimize their capital spend versus utilization. Automation of these environments must be drilled into the organizational DNA to speed processes, reduce human errors, increase system uptime and lower operational staffing needs. Business leaders of tomorrow understand business transformation and are leveraging all of today's hardware and software tools to transform and optimize their organization into a change at the ‘speed of thought’ engine. CR

