



Community Health Plan of Washington Improves Access to Health Care with Nimble Storage SmartStack for Business-Critical Applications

Nimble, Cisco UCS, and VMware platform enables cost-effective upgrade of IT infrastructure and reduction of data center footprint

A Leader in Health Care Delivery

Community Health Plan of Washington (CHPW) was created in 1992 by a group of community health centers across Washington State that believed traditional health plans were not meeting the needs of their patients. For more than 30 years, those who are underinsured have relied on local clinics for access to primary health care and other vital local community services. By collaborating with the State's community health center delivery system, CHPW has now been able to address the comprehensive health needs of these underserved Washington State residents.

CHPW has earned its reputation as a leader in creating health care products and services tailored to the needs of low-income individuals and families, diverse ethnic groups, recent immigrants, and people with complex health conditions. The plan's 288,000 members are now able to receive services from more than 2,725 primary care providers and 14,350 specialists, at more than 596 primary care sites and 100 hospitals, located across 39 Washington counties.

Unlike traditional health plans, CHPW measures its success by the health care dollars it returns to its communities. As a not-for-profit organization, CHPW reinvests all excess funds back into its health centers by funding measures that improve service quality and access to care. Simply put, CHPW makes a positive impact on the health of Washington residents, supports hundreds of local health centers, and significantly contributes to the fiscal viability of Washington State.

Small Space and Tight Budgets

CHPW runs its IT operations from two separate datacenters—a production site in Seattle and a second site in Spokane for failover, disaster recovery, and testing. “We were relying on several aging HP servers for our VM clusters, a Compellent SAN for production and development, and an older version of VMware vSphere for virtualization,” explained Amado M. Garcia, senior systems administrator at CHPW. “Since many of our systems were reaching end-of-life, we knew it was time to upgrade our environment to support our growing development operations and mission-critical applications.”

One of the key problems with the company's existing Compellent SAN was its very large footprint, according to Garcia. “We are very limited on data center space at our two sites. Due to the high costs of space and power, we wanted to find a newer storage solution that would enable us to fit a lot more storage capacity into our existing space.”

In addition to the facility constraints, scaling storage capacity cost-effectively was also a big issue for CHPW. “Our 24 TB SQL database was running out of space,” Garcia noted. “We also had several new applications under development. We needed the ability to create additional development, testing, and production environments for these applications without breaking the bank.”

Customer Case Study

Community Health Plan of Washington



Customer Challenges

- Aging IT infrastructure was reaching end-of-life, due for a technology refresh
- Existing SAN was consuming too much datacenter space
- Upgrade of current storage platform was cost-prohibitive

Solution: Nimble Storage SmartStack™ for Business-Critical Applications

- Nimble Storage CS-240 and CS460G-X2 arrays
- VMware vSphere 5.1 virtualization platform
- Cisco UCS B200 M3 blade servers
- Nimble Storage InfoSight

Business Benefits

- Obtained high performing storage at half the cost of upgrading existing SAN
- Replaced 42U Compellent footprint with just 6U of Nimble Storage
- Simplified storage administration

“We can now do everything we were doing with 42U of Compellent with just 6U of Nimble Storage.”

Amado M. Garcia
Senior Systems Administrator
Community Health Plan of Washington

“CHPW is a not-for-profit organization, so controlling costs is always a key focus for us,” Garcia said. “We initially looked at upgrading our existing Compellent SAN, but it was a very expensive proposition. In addition to adding more disks, it would have required a complete forklift upgrade to change out the controllers if we wanted to move up to the next version of Compellent’s product.”

Seeking a Better Storage Platform

Due to the high costs of the proposed Compellent upgrade, Garcia and his team started searching for other storage options. “We looked at solutions from several of the traditional, large storage vendors, but all of their options were far too costly. And from past experience with some vendors, even if they offer you a very low cost to ‘get their foot in the door’, they will get you on support after you purchase their hardware. We did some more research, and luckily found Nimble Storage.”

The New Cisco UCS, VMware, and Nimble SmartStack Solution

CHPW brought in a Nimble CS240 array for validation and testing late last year. “We wanted to see if the array would perform well in our environment,” Garcia said. “During this time, Nimble released its new product line with increased CPU power, memory, and SSD space. We decided to purchase an additional CS460 to take advantage of these upgrades for our SQL servers. We were very impressed with its performance. Deploying and integrating the arrays into our environment was also very painless.”

CHPW now has four Nimble arrays, two for its production site in Seattle, and at the DR data center in Spokane. All SQL 2008, SharePoint 2010, file shares, and many of its internal applications are now on the Nimble arrays. They have implemented the Nimble Storage SmartStack™ for Business-Critical Applications, with two Cisco UCS B200 M3 Blade Servers and the VMware vSphere™ 5.1 virtualization platform. “We have a total of eight SQL servers, averaging 3 TB of data each. That adds up to over 24 TB of SQL data on our Nimble arrays. And even at that size, the performance is excellent!”

Achieving 2x Cost Savings

“By moving to Nimble Storage, we were able to achieve significant cost savings,” Garcia reported. “The price for the Compellent upgrade would have been at least 1.5 to 2x more than the Nimble arrays, due to the need to upgrade the outdated Compellent controllers. The relatively low cost of the Nimble Storage was also a huge selling point for us.”

Reducing Storage Footprint from 42U to 6U

In addition to the lower upfront costs for purchasing the Nimble arrays, CHPW’s datacenter space savings were also impressive, according to Garcia. “We were relying on a full 42U rack of Compellent disk drives that gave us about 40 TB of space. But just one 3u box from Nimble can hold 24 TB of data! I can now do everything we were doing with 42U of Compellent with only 6U of Nimble Storage. As a result, we were able to reduce our costs for space, power, and AC by a factor of 7 to 1.”

Improving Data Protection and Disaster Recovery

CHPW backs up all of its data using VMware SRM 5.1, to its two Cisco UCS B200 M3 blade servers located at the company’s Spokane datacenter. “We back up over a terabyte of data each night,” Garcia reported. “It is actually about 2.5 TB of data, but the Nimble snapshots are so efficient, they reduce that amount down to 1 TB. We did some testing on recovery from our DR site a few months ago and it worked beautifully.”

No More Headaches

“Storage administration is extremely simple and straightforward with the Nimble arrays,” Garcia said. “We just set them up and let them go. It’s very easy to manage and create LUNs, setup the snapshots, and do the replication. Upgrades on the Nimble arrays are also very fast and easy. It does the failover, updates the controller, and it’s immediately back online. The Nimble upgrades are a completely seamless process—no headaches, no problems.”

Relying on Nimble Storage InfoSight and Support

Garcia and his team starting using Nimble Storage InfoSight earlier this year. InfoSight™ integrates, automates, and substantially simplifies storage administrative tasks, ensuring the optimal health of all Nimble Storage arrays. Built on powerful deep data analytics technologies, the centralized InfoSight Engine monitors all Nimble Storage assets collectively from the cloud. The engine analyzes millions of data points every day to build complete insight into overall health of the Nimble arrays.

“The Nimble Support experience has been impressive and very proactive, especially since we started using Nimble InfoSight,” Garcia acknowledged. “It’s nice being able to see more detail on what we are doing on our end, but it’s also great to know that Nimble is watching out for us too in case there are any issues that we missed.”

Concluding Thoughts

“The Nimble technology is remarkable! It was exactly what we hoped for,” Garcia concluded. “I’m really excited to see what new things Nimble will dream up in the future!”

About Nimble Storage

Nimble Storage believes enterprises should not have to compromise on performance, capacity, ease of use, or price. Nimble has developed the first hybrid storage architecture engineered from the ground up to seamlessly integrate flash and high-capacity drives. Our customers enjoy as much as 10x faster application performance, enhanced backup and disaster recovery, and stress-free operations—all while lowering their TCO. Nimble Storage solutions are available through a global network of world-class channel partners. For more information, visit www.nimblestorage.com and follow us on Twitter: @nimblestorage.



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