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Reliable, Continuous Uptime & Availability

NEC's Fault-Tolerant Servers Give Insurance Company Peace Of Mind When It Comes To Serving Its Customers

by Kris Glaser Brambila

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BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD of Nebraska is the leading healthcare provider in the state, serving nearly 717,000 individuals. Founded in 1939, the company offers health insurance to families, individuals, and companies of all sizes. Apparent in its mission statement, BCBS of Nebraska strives, above all, to provide the health and wellness solutions that its customers will find most beneficial, giving them the reassurance and peace of mind promised in BCBS' slogan: "One Less Thing To Worry About."

Like any business that handles critical information, BCBS of Nebraska must keep track of sensitive information about its customers and must depend on the availability of that information at all times. That fundamental need has always existed, but without the proper infrastructure, BCBS of Nebraska can't wholly serve its customers to the company's standards. That's why nearly four years ago, BCBS of Nebraska began investigating the use of the family of fault-tolerant servers offered by NEC.

Fault Tolerance

NEC's fault-tolerant servers are built to keep your company's critical data and applications running at all times. According to Mike Mitsch, manager for NEC's IT Platform Group, fault-tolerant servers are most useful for companies that store vulnerable information. "Fault-tolerant systems have been used in the most mission-critical applications, such as 911 systems, air-traffic control systems, [and] areas for financial data, where absolutely no data can be lost," he says. That includes the healthcare insurance industry.

After researching NEC, BCBS of Nebraska purchased multiple fault-tolerant modules, according to Jodi Shely, system administrator II at BCBS of Nebraska and vExpert 2010 for the VMware User Group board of directors. "Scalability, redundancy, and performance

are three of the highest key points that we use [NEC's] servers for," Shely says. BCBS of Nebraska uses NEC's Express5800 A1160, which features a four- or six-core Intel Xeon 7400 processor and up to 1TB of total memory when using four modules together.

The Express5800 A1160 is just one example of the fault-tolerant servers from NEC. The company recently announced that its Express5800 R320a and 320Fd models support VMware vSphere natively, giving organizations more uptime for their most critical virtualization applications. Regarding the announcement, NEC's Mitsch states that every CIO should be taking the time to understand how the new fault-tolerant systems can benefit their business, "as they deploy mission-critical, performance-oriented applications into the virtualization environment."

Shely says the Express5800 A1160 servers will see a larger implementation at BCBS in the near future. "I think that we're going to start seeing more scalability with these fault-tolerant servers when it comes to Active Directory and SQL servers and applications being isolated," she says. "That server is really going to start to take off once people start to see what kind of fault tolerance they want to put on applications in remote locations."

Shely says that BCBS of Nebraska is more than satisfied with the servers. The servers' performance is

one of the main reasons the company chose NEC. "The NEC servers outperformed the current products being offered," she says. And Shely would know. Previously, BCBS of Nebraska was using servers provided by an NEC competitor, and although Shely says the servers worked well enough, NEC's fault-tolerant servers offered more of the benefits and reliability BCBS needed.

Service & Installation

BCBS of Nebraska was also looking to be taken care of by its server manufacturer. "[NEC] provides great support and reliability with their server maintenance [and] server troubleshooting," Shely says. As far as downtime goes, Shely explains, BCBS of Nebraska has only experienced one server outage in more than a year, and that wasn't even an error with the server. "We had one issue, and that was due to third-party agents running Windows Server," she says.

Shely is appreciative of NEC's support. "They're Johnny-on-the-spot when it comes to an issue," she says. "If you have an issue, you immediately get somebody," she says.

Implementing NEC's fault-tolerant servers, Shely says, was a cinch. "They actually had somebody come onsite," she says. "They were here through the entire implementation and provided awesome follow-up." Shely says that NEC is still following up to make sure its systems are running the way BCBS wants them to. "They're not just one to leave you with a product and walk away. They support it until it's fully implemented and then provide support afterwards," she says.

Because of NEC's fault-tolerant servers, BCBS of Nebraska can maintain its reliable services for customers without the worry of unexpected and costly downtime. "We've gotten more than what we expected out of the fault-tolerant systems," Shely says.