

A Major Food Producer relies on a fully virtualized SAP environment to run all of its business operations. When performance started to seriously lag due to the age of the storage infrastructure, negatively impacting critical business functions, all-flash arrays from Pure Storage were installed. The performance issues were resolved immediately, and the IT staff now spends radically less time managing storage. These benefits will result in millions of dollars in reduced costs and preserved capital investment.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Employees in both the head office and at production plants see much faster response times when using SAP to conduct business-critical transactions and generate valuable reports. The IT staff now spends almost no time managing storage, and the company has calculated capital and operating savings of more than \$2 million over five years.

GEO

North America

INDUSTRY

Manufacturing

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*Steve, Manager of
Enterprise Systems and Storage*

PURE STORAGE TAKES A BIG BITE OUT OF COSTS FOR MAJOR FOOD PRODUCER

For a major producer of food products that supplies its commercial customers with more than a billion pounds of ingredients a year, efficiency in all business and manufacturing processes is a necessity. Margins are tight, efficient inventory management is critical, customers are highly sensitive to price changes, and consistently high quality is expected of all products.

For many years, senior management paid scant attention to the role that information technology played in the company’s operations. By 2014 the compute and storage infrastructure was severely out of date, leading to lagging performance of the SAP system, which runs all of the company’s core processes.

“It got to the point that for many SAP transactions, employees would click the icon, go get a cup of coffee and chat with someone, and then come back and hope the transaction was completed,” recalled Steve, manager of enterprise systems and storage. “Slow performance was a major complaint from end-users throughout the company, both at headquarters and at the plants.”

The company (which has asked not to be identified for competitive reasons) operates multiple production plants across the United States. Most of the SAP processing takes place at the main data center at company headquarters, but each plant also has a small compute and storage footprint.

COMMITMENT TO VIRTUALIZATION DRIVES A NEED FOR NEW STORAGE

To address the performance problems, the IT department received approval to install a new compute and storage infrastructure, one based on virtualizing SAP. “Virtualizing SAP was important,” Steve said, “because we had to have more performance from both compute and storage; we needed the flexibility to quickly spin up new environments for test and development; and we wanted better replication capabilities for our DR site.” The company was pleased with its existing server, networking and virtualization software suppliers (HP, Cisco and VMware, respectively), but was unsure about staying with its incumbent storage provider.

“We had only limited satisfaction with our storage supplier,” Steve noted. “We knew for sure that we needed better performance than we were getting from spinning disk, but weren’t sure they were the right platform for SAP.”

COMPANY:

Major Food Producer

USE CASE:

- VSI – VMware® vSphere®
- Database – SAP®
- Applications – SAP

CHALLENGES:

- Underpowered storage system caused performance delays in mission-critical SAP applications.
- Aging storage infrastructure offered no growth path to accommodate workload expansion.

IT TRANSFORMATION:

- Key SAP transactions and reports are now generated in as much as **99% less time**.
- **IT staff can be redeployed** to conduct more valuable tasks rather than time-consuming storage administration.
- **Savings of more than \$2 million** are expected over five years in total cost of ownership, which allows the company to invest in innovative IT projects.

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Steve, Manager of Enterprise Systems and Storage

The company’s legacy spinning-disk storage platform suffered from high latencies, and burdened the IT staff with complex management demands. “There was a balancing act to manage the LUNs across controllers, and it always seemed we were behind the curve on that,” Steve noted. “Plus, the storage system did not de-dupe on the fly, so running the de-dupe process impacted performance. It was a no-win situation.”

The company hired Corus360, an Atlanta-based technology consulting firm, to create a roadmap for the change to virtualization, which included an RFP for storage equipment. Four companies were invited to respond, including the incumbent vendor. Key decision criteria included ease of management, low latency, high reliability, and simplicity of updates.

On all counts, Pure Storage emerged as the best pick to supply the new storage. But in a conservatively run company without a history of innovation in IT, the selection of a young company to supply such a critical product was met with resistance.

“All of us knew that Pure Storage was the right move; there wasn’t any doubt about the technical decision,” Steve recalled, “but senior management was leery. They wanted to know if Pure was going to be there when we needed them.”

The turning point, he added, came when executives of the food company met with the leadership of Pure Storage at its California headquarters. “They were convinced when they found out what kind of company Pure Storage was, what kind of people were running the company, and how they dealt with their customers.”

Another impetus to the purchase decision was a TCO analysis, using the food manufacturer’s own numbers, that showed a savings of more than \$2 million over five years by using Pure Storage compared to the incumbent vendor’s response to the RFP. The calculations included the cost of SAP downtime, which can exceed \$10,000 per minute.

The savings came from several sources, including fewer staff resources dedicated to storage management and charges for ongoing hardware and software maintenance. In addition, with the Evergreen Storage program from Pure Storage, the company would receive new controllers for its arrays after three years and preserve the investment it had already made. This is in contrast to the business model offered by every other storage vendor competing in the RFP. Their approach would have forced a forklift upgrade after three or four years which would result in wiping out the previous investment.

PURE STORAGE IMPROVES PERFORMANCE, SIMPLIFIES MANAGEMENT

Once installed, the new Pure Storage system quickly proved its value. “From a day-to-day perspective, it couldn’t be more night-and-day compared to our previous storage system,” Steve said. “Our business-intelligence environment is seeing significant gains. And our quality-control team is thrilled by the performance gains they have seen just by moving storage to a new platform, nothing else.”

Steve also pointed to a remarkable improvement in one particular SAP query, which used to take upwards of 24 hours to complete. “If someone made a mistake, or if they got an answer they didn’t understand, then it was another 18 to 24 hours to run it again.” Once SAP was moved onto the virtualized server environment and Pure Storage, the same query took 20 minutes to complete – a reduction of 99 percent. The huge time savings mean employees now have the flexibility to run a greater variety of queries, yielding better results and more valuable insights.

“The first time they ran it after the change,” Steve recounted, “they were sure something was wrong. They ran the query six times before they figured out that it was just that much faster. It was pretty staggering. And that’s just one example.”

Steve also noticed the big change that Pure Storage made in the time required to manage storage. “One of my main complaints about our previous storage system was that I had to have at least one high-dollar resource on my team just to do storage. It was a painful environment to manage, especially when compared to Pure Storage.

“Now, I have people who work on storage only when they have to, and that isn’t very often with Pure, because it is so easy to deal with,” he added. “We set up new storage in a matter of minutes, and then it’s on to other parts of the job.”

Responsibility for managing the Pure Storage array in the primary data center was recently given to an outside resource, Steve said, “and it took him just 15 minutes to set up the array, and he had never seen a Pure Storage environment before. It’s just amazing when you can lay eyes on an environment for the first time and set it up properly in 15 minutes.”

In addition to all-flash arrays installed in the main data center and the disaster-recovery site, the company has purchased Pure Storage arrays for each of its processing plants.

Steve praised the data-reduction ratios the company has been receiving from the Pure Storage arrays, ranging from 4.5:1 to as high as 14:1. “When you consider that our previous array wasn’t de-duped or compressed at all, we’re thrilled. It means we can pack a lot more data on the arrays, and go longer between purchases.”

Steve noted that in addition to the improved performance and impressive cost savings, one aspect of Pure Storage stands out in his mind. “On the rare occasions when there has been an issue with one of our arrays, I find out about it when Pure calls me and tells me they’re already working on it. In all my years of experience in IT, no other vendor has ever called me with a problem before I know about it. It’s extraordinary.”

Steve noted that thanks to Pure Storage, he and his team now spend less time and resources maintaining SAP, allowing more investment in innovative solutions that add business value.

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