

Investec Asset Management uses Pure Storage all-flash arrays to deliver performance, reliability and ease of use that changed storage management from a nightmare into “something we don’t think about any more.”

**BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION**

Fund managers, analysts and other key employees have consistent, rapid access to the data they need to do their jobs with peak efficiency, while IT staff can turn their attention away from managing legacy storage toward high-value strategic initiatives.

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Manager, IT Infrastructure

INVESTEC ASSET MANAGEMENT FUELS INNOVATION WITH PURE STORAGE

Throughout the history of money management, access to information has been the key to greater returns. As the pace and reach of global finance accelerates, speed has become an equally important factor in ensuring success. To meet these requirements, Investec Asset Management (Investec) invests in the best possible IT infrastructure in order to provide key employees the information they need in the most efficient manner. And when selecting data management solutions, Investec believes that the best solution is Pure Storage.

Investec provides investment products and services to institutions, advisory clients and individuals. Its clients include pension funds, central banks, sovereign wealth funds, insurers, foundations, financial advisers and individual investors. Founded in South Africa in 1991, it now operates worldwide, and manages assets of around \$140 billion (as of March 2018).

In 2012, the IT department at Investec was in a situation most enterprises face at some point: its primary storage system was at the end of its three-year maintenance period, forcing it into another forklift upgrade with the accompanying costs, complexity and disruption. Dave Comben Manager of IT Infrastructure at Investec’s London headquarters, had been through this before — and hated it.

“We were in a horrible place,” said Comben, “We would kick off a routine SQL Server backup, and you’d lose Blackberry emails for 10 minutes. It was just awful. And being at the end of your maintenance window meant any improvement would come at a huge expense.”

STORAGE INVESTMENT OPTIONS LEAD TO PURE STORAGE AS THE ANSWER

Comben solicited bids on a new storage infrastructure from his incumbent vendor and another major supplier. As that process began, he was approached by what was then a new name in the industry — Pure Storage. “At the time, Pure was a young company and all-flash arrays were still a pretty new idea. But we invited them to bid, and they brought in a FlashArray™ under their Love Your Storage program,” where customers can use a Pure array for 30 days and, if not fully satisfied, return it with no obligation or cost.

“You could tell right away that Pure Storage was designed by people who understand my job,” Comben said. “They totally know how I want storage to look, feel and perform.”

COMPANY:

Investec Asset Management
www.investecassetmanagement.com

USE CASE:

- Database – Microsoft® SQL Server
- Virtual Server Infrastructure – VMware® vSphere®

CHALLENGES:

- Legacy storage system was at the end of its life, resulting in diminishing performance and challenging management headaches.

IT TRANSFORMATION:

- Storage management problems eliminated.
- Ability to clone databases rapidly with minimal impact on storage capacity.
- Data-center rack space for storage slashed by 90%.
- Access to all databased reduced to sub-1ms.

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Comben never returned the Pure Storage array. “It did exactly what they said it would do and solved all of our storage issues right away.” Investec purchased a second FlashArray for its backup data center in London, and soon acquired two additional for use in their larger data centers in Cape Town, South Africa, “so that our storage environment would be consistent, and so everyone would enjoy the same level of performance.”

The Pure Storage arrays fit seamlessly into Investec’s data center, which is almost exclusively based on Microsoft applications and x86 servers. The infrastructure is heavily virtualized using VMware vSphere and deploys more than 60 SQL Server databases. Those databases form two data warehouses (one institutional, the other retail) containing the market and trading data that fund managers, analysts, and client-service personnel rely on to do their jobs. ThinkFolio software is the primary application platform for front-office dealers and fund managers.

“STORAGE ISN’T SOMETHING WE THINK ABOUT ANYMORE”

Each night, the two data warehouses (each about 6TB) are refreshed with the previous day’s trades and market activity. This process begins around 0100 hours and is completed around 0430 hours. These data warehouses are, in Comben’s words, “the fount of all knowledge, and are essential for doing business.”

With Investec’s legacy storage system, these data warehouses required constant attention. Now, that has all changed. “Pure Storage is so good, storage isn’t something we think about anymore. If you want more space, you just provision what you need. You don’t have to hold a meeting to decide what group to put it in, or when it will take place. Pure makes storage what it should be.”

The effortless management of Pure Storage has freed up the IT staff to handle more strategic projects. “We now spend our time on things that actually make a difference to our end-users, like enabling new mobility solutions so our key apps are available on tablets and phones.”

Comben cites numerous aspects of Pure Storage arrays that he values. High on his list is the snapshot feature built into Purity software. “We don’t run many systems, but we do run a lot of copies. For each data warehouse, we make four or five copies — for instance, for development, testing, pre-production. They all go through the same load and extract process overnight. Plus, we make four copies of ThinkFolio every night. With its performance and amazingly good de-dupe and compression, Pure handles all of these simultaneous workloads easily. To run that many copies of our data warehouses so quickly and easily is of real value to us.”

Because the contents of the data warehouses are very similar, Investec capitalizes on the data reduction features that come standard with Pure Storage. “We are getting 7.9:1 data reduction across the board,” Comben reported, “and as much as 8.3:1 in our VMware environment. That means we can have all these copies and consume virtually no capacity. I have a 31.5TB array onto which we have provisioned 238TB. I love it!”

The ability to make copies so easily has multiple benefits, he added. “It means that when one of your DBAs wants to set up another test environment and asks if it’s possible to get a new copy of the database, I can just say, ‘no problem, mate; you’ll have it in 10 minutes.’”

ACCELERATING SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS ANALYTICS

Pure Storage also makes possible expanded innovation among Investec’s software developers and business analysts. “Every week, we have people who want to test out new ideas using the latest data from our production database,” Comben noted. “With our previous storage, that was a six- to seven-hour process. With Pure Protection Groups, it’s

about a minute and a half. We take snapshots every hour of all our production databases, and then use those snapshots to restore to other environments. This gives everyone the chance to try out new ideas whenever they want.”

The speed of snapshotting impressed another of Investec’s vendors. “We were installing a new release of ThinkFolio where an error occurred in the software and the upgrade failed. They asked if they could restore the database to where it was when they began. I literally right-clicked on the Pure Storage console and in a few seconds, we were back where we began. They said, ‘How did you do that!’ And I said, ‘That’s just what we’ve come to expect from Pure.’”

EFFORTLESS MANAGEMENT FREES UP IT STAFF

Until recently, Investec managed its global IT infrastructure with a lean staff of four. “We didn’t have enough people to waste time on the complexities of our old storage, so the simplicity and ease of Pure Storage is a huge benefit to us. We know now that if there’s a problem somewhere, the chance of it being in storage is unbelievably remote.”

Pure Storage has also contributed to the success of the company’s virtualization strategy. “We can now spin up a VM in about 20 seconds,” Comben noted. “We frequently engage with other vendors who see how well our standard VMs perform and they tell us, ‘your storage is amazing.’”

A further benefit is the small footprint of the Pure Storage array. In 2015, Investec consolidated its IT infrastructure into a new co-location facility in London where space is offered at a premium. “We went from 2½ cabinets for our old system to just 4U for Pure. And today, it’s still only 10U.”

After nearly 30 years in IT and more than five years as a customer of Pure Storage, Comben said, “the Pure support team can still blow me away. They constantly monitor things and will tell us when we have a problem even before we know it and even if it doesn’t involve storage. You tell me another company that does that.”

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