

Allant Group is tasked with turning mountains of data into actionable customer insights for leading companies in financial services, insurance, media and retail. This requires a modern data infrastructure to perform complex statistical analysis and modeling. To meet this demanding requirement, Allant selected FlashBlade™ from Pure Storage for its scalability, high-IOPS and high-bandwidth performance, ability to handle all data types, and ease of management.



BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Clients develop measurably improved marketing programs thanks to the insights and analysis that Allant develops, using FlashBlade and FlashStack solutions from Pure Storage.

GEO

North America

INDUSTRY

Marketing Services

“We already were happy with our FlashArray, and the experience with FlashBlade has reinforced that Pure Storage is a great partner for Allant.”

Dave Rosenstein,
Manager, Systems Administration

ALLANT GROUP CHOOSES FLASHBLADE AND HORTONWORKS TO ACCELERATE TIME-TO-CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

The arrival of Big Data analytics has given marketers new tools for meeting the challenge of attracting and retaining customers. Because many companies lack the specialized data scientists and high-performance IT systems needed to perform complex analysis, they turn to customer analytics service providers to help turn mountains of data into actionable insights.

A leader among customer analytics service providers is the Allant Group, which provides data analysis and consulting services that help its clients acquire, retain and win back customers. “Our clients have lots and lots of data, which our data scientists enhance. This enables our analytics teams to build models that create a positive return on investment,” said Dave Rosenstein, manager of the systems administration team at Allant. Allant employs exclusive tools such as Identity Resolution Services to enhance data, which clients access through Allant’s OneTouch platform.

Allant’s clients include major companies in financial services, insurance, retail, media and publishing. Typically, business-intelligence personnel at the client either work with Allant’s data scientists to mine insights from data, or access Allant’s data analytics system directly to submit queries.

NEW DATA CENTER NEEDS MODERN DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2016, Allant installed a new data center in a co-location facility in suburban Chicago to provide an IT infrastructure capable of handling its data-processing needs for years to come. It is based on a FlashStack infrastructure that combines Cisco UCS® server blades and Nexus switches, a FlashArray™/M70 array from Pure Storage, and VMware virtualization software. By converging modern compute, network and storage components into a single, integrated architecture that is validated with production workloads and applications, FlashStack accelerates time to deployment, lowers overall IT costs and reduces deployment risk.

The Pure Storage array supports all of Allant’s virtualized servers, as well as its Oracle data warehouses. “When we virtualized our infrastructure, we felt it was essential to install Pure, because the performance requirements of our data analytics will continue to grow,” said Dan Otterness, an infrastructure manager who oversaw the change to new storage. “We were impressed by the architecture of the Pure array, and all the features that are included as standard. Plus, Pure’s business model is unique in the industry. The Pure Evergreen™ Storage program really provides long-term value.”

COMPANY:

Allant Group
www.allantgroup.com

USE CASE:

- FlashBlade – Data analytics, Hortonworks®
- Database – Oracle®, Hadoop®
- VSI – VMware® vSphere®

CHALLENGES:

- Clients with ever-growing volumes of data need faster response time to queries.
- Clients also need more complex analyses to quickly model the effectiveness of potential marketing programs.

IT TRANSFORMATION:

- New, high-impact applications are now offered to clients.
- Dedicated storage administrator positions no longer required.

“Modern data infrastructure tools to support Hortonworks need to deliver real-time performance with cloud-like simplicity. FlashBlade from Pure Storage is unique in meeting this criteria.”

Dan Otterness, *Infrastructure Manager*

The Pure Evergreen Storage program guarantees customers access to the latest technology and features without forklift upgrades or disruption to operations, with full protection of prior investments in Pure Storage solutions.

FLASHBLADE: MODERN DATA PLATFORM FOR HORTONWORKS

Among the advanced tools Allant is using to meet the ever-growing needs of its clients is Hortonworks, an enterprise-class open source Apache™ Hadoop platform designed to accommodate large amounts of data-at-rest. “For many years, we did all our analysis using Oracle databases on spinning-disk storage,” Otterness said. “In order to keep up with the volume and velocity of our clients’ data, we turned to the Hortonworks big data solution.”

While Hortonworks met Allant’s database software needs, a better data infrastructure was required, according to Allant. “That’s because a traditional storage solution for a Hortonworks environment consists of legacy spinning disks in a large number of servers, typically over-provisioned by 3x what is actually required,” said Otterness. “If we had adopted this approach, it would have resulted in slower performance, complexity, wasted budget, and a backward-looking infrastructure that wouldn’t meet our ‘future-proof’ objectives.”

Moving to Hadoop meant Allant needed a storage platform with performance headroom to handle any data type running concurrently. “We recognized the need for a scale-out data hub capable of seamless growth into the future,” Otterness said.

According to Otterness, “Modern data infrastructure tools to support Hortonworks need to deliver real-time performance with cloud-like simplicity. FlashBlade from Pure Storage is unique in meeting this criteria.” As a modern data hub, FlashBlade is purpose built to deliver the performance and scalability essential for advanced, massively parallel applications like data analytics, artificial intelligence and deep learning.

“Our clients present us with all types of data — large and small file formats, structured and unstructured, you name it — and we have to be able to handle all of it without compromising time-to-insight,” Rosenstein noted. “This is exactly what FlashBlade provides for our clients.”

Allant has deployed Hortonworks on FlashBlade initially for one of its most strategic clients, and anticipates adding additional clients who utilize different data types and analytic requests in the months ahead. “FlashBlade functions as a dynamic data hub, built to support all types of data loads,” Otterness noted, “and that is exactly what we need to meet client demands.”

DELIVERING CLOUD-LIKE SIMPLICITY

“The applications we want to run on Hortonworks demand agility, as well as high performance, which FlashBlade is architected to deliver,” Otterness noted. “We also wanted to separate storage from fixed compute platforms, so we don’t add storage when we need compute and vice versa. With FlashBlade and Evergreen Storage, we can easily add storage capacity far into the future, whenever we need it.”

He added, “We always look for the best technology at the best price-point, and FlashBlade delivers.”

One of the reasons Allant opted for FlashBlade was its experience with the effortless management of its Pure Storage FlashArray. “I pretty much put myself out of a storage administrator job when we brought in Pure, because end-users can now manage the arrays themselves – especially FlashBlade,” Otterness said. “For example, the Hadoop admin just creates the NFS mounts and you’re done. Likewise, a VMware administrator just goes into the FlashArray, creates data stores and connects them to vCenter. Administering a Pure array is a breeze.”

Removal of the time-consuming management complexities of legacy storage have allowed Otterness and colleagues to turn their attention to more strategic initiatives designed to accelerate the rollout of advanced services to clients.

The IT team is bullish about customer support from Pure Storage. “The team from Pure has been great; very responsive and very proactive,” Rosenstein said. “When we were getting the FlashBlade set up, they installed a duplicate environment in their offices to do some testing, without us even asking for it. The suggestions they came up with – such as creating eight parallel paths instead of two – improved performance considerably.”

He added, “We already were happy with our FlashArray, and the experience with FlashBlade has reinforced that Pure Storage is a great partner for Allant.”

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Dan Otterness, *Infrastructure Manager*



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