Hewlett Packard Enterprise

Semitour uses hyperconvergence to modernize its system

With HPE SimpliVity, Semitour gains security and functionality

Industry
Tourism

Objective
To modernize the information system to introduce new services, protect data, and facilitate management

Approach
To meet its current and future needs, Semitour has chosen HPE SimpliVity hyperconverged infrastructure
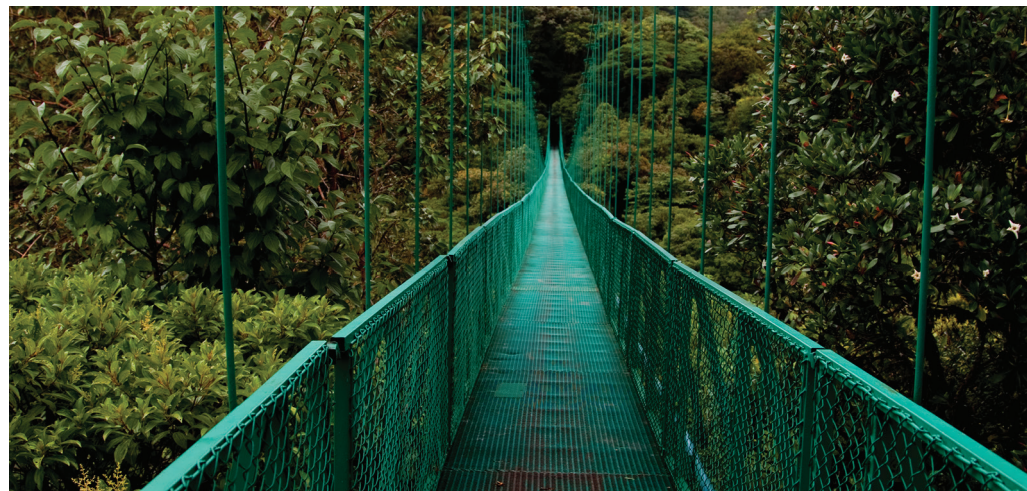
IT matters
• High availability of the information system
• Secured data
• Implementation of a business continuity plan (BCP)
• A centralized all-flash hyperconverged solution for all sites

Business matters
• Faster response times
• Better ticketing management
• Improved distribution of business applications on virtual machines

Semitour operates cultural sites, and accommodation and leisure facilities in the Dordogne region. Its obsolete computer architecture and the opening of the International Center for Cave Art, encouraged it to modernize its infrastructure by opting for HPE SimpliVity hyperconverged infrastructure. The result—high availability, secure data, and an active BCP.

The challenge

To modernize the information system

As a manager of cultural sites, accommodation, and leisure activities, Semitour is the leading tourism management company in the Dordogne department. It is a semi-public company, with the aim of developing tourist numbers at its sites and optimizing its economic results while preserving the fundamental principles of public service. The sites that it manages fall into four categories—cultural sites (castles, caves, parks, and such), accommodation sites (campsites, self-catered cottages, chalets and mobile homes, package tours, and activities), water sports leisure centers (lakes), and its head office.

In November 2016, Paul Guiteau took up his position as Information Systems Manager at the company. His first observation was that the IT architecture was old, with servers at the end of their useful life, slow SDSL connections of 8 Mbps, and problematic air conditioning. Also, just at this time, Lascaux was opening, an ultramodern building where the different areas use the latest digital tools including

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augmented reality and 3D screens. This International Center for Cave Art has several air-conditioned IT rooms, a double optic fiber connection, and a triple power supply. Most importantly, digital technology is reaching its full potential here, with Big Data being associated with the notion of Museum 2.0.

Geolocated tablets for visitors
For example, visitors equipped with tablets are geolocated by the applications, allowing access to content in their respective languages and a personalized route. Not to mention the fact that visitors can access additional multimedia information after their stay on-site. Result—after six months of operation at the Lascaux site, which received 500,000 visitors in 2017, Paul Guiteau decided it was time to launch the overall modernization of Semitour's IT.

The first objective was to develop specifications for the existing technical environment, the many varied needs (particularly with regard to online and on-site ticketing), the applications essential to Semitour's business activity, and data security in the form of a business resumption plan (BRP) and a BCP. The call for tenders was launched at the beginning of 2017 with the aim of taking advantage of Lascaux's many IT rooms to bring everything together in the same place.

The solution

Hyperconvergence for optimal operation
After contacting several service providers, the Bordeaux company, Cheops Technology, offered Semitour the HPE SimpliVity solution. The hyperconverged solution would allow Semitour to benefit from the same advantages as a data center but on-site. "Our initial need was to provide

a high level of services for business applications with a reduced inaccessibility period," says Paul Guiteau. Equipped with several server rooms at Lascaux site #4, Semitour also wished to have a BCP at the storage level, synchronizing the information on different machines.

Indeed, ticketing data has incalculable commercial value for activity at cultural sites. A loss of five minutes of transactions after an online or physical sale can generate errors in the database that may lead to inconsistency in the data.

The same principle applies equally to other services or business applications. The HPE SimpliVity solution offers data security that Semitour can rely on. Physically, the company installed two HPE SimpliVity hyperconverged nodes, each in a specific room and linked to each other. Each node delivers the services of server, 100% flash storage, and storage networking. "If one breaks down, the other one takes over immediately, and the data is always available and protected," says Paul Guiteau. And 30 virtual machines are spread over these systems, providing access to business applications such as accounting, ticketing, office automation, the organization of timed visits, the connected building management, and even the scenography.

A protected environment that is easy to manage
Here too, the importance of an ultra-modern and functional IT architecture cannot be overstated. In fact, with their tablets, visitors can interact with the scenography. For example, by badging on a reading device, a person can answer questions, sketch drawings, and modify what is projected on the screens. If a server is down, this would cause malfunctions in the scenography, resulting in a spoiled visit.

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HPE SimpliVity avoids this pitfall. Moreover, all new infrastructure is managed under VMware vCenter® and supported by HPE Proactive Care services.

The benefits

Secured, high availability

One of the main advantages of the new hyperconverged infrastructure is that it integrates a fully controlled storage solution. The solution includes 100% flash storage, which makes it possible to optimize database response times, particularly in regard to speeding up ticketing processes. This acceleration is also the result of deduplication and on-the-fly data compression in the 11 TB of SSD storage space in each node. The presence of an accelerator card in HPE SimpliVity makes it possible to perform an almost instant backup. The backup of each 1 TB virtual machine takes only one minute, and the same applies to data recovery. "So this speed allows us to have a granularity of the backup over time," says Paul Guiteau.

As the architecture is managed within the vCenter environment, all administration interfaces are simplified. But this is not all. With vCenter, you can manage an "extended cluster." In this case, HPE SimpliVity servers are pooled together to act as a single system to provide high availability and load balancing, even though they are not in the same location.

An extended cluster also ensures easy migration of virtual machines from one geographical location to another while maintaining network connections with the other hyperconverged node in the cluster. This scenario can be useful if, for example,

a failure occurs at one place. In this case, the critical virtual machines can be migrated to the other node of the extended cluster that is physically located in a different room. During the launch of Lascaux, Paul Guiteau was able to not only to manage the new infrastructure by himself but also call on external contributors. The latter, being familiar with the VMware® environment, knew how to deal with even the slightest difficulties.

A crucial service contract

HPE SimpliVity also has a major advantage in terms of security of access—the ability to create different levels of intervention according to the technicians and their skills. "We manage the IT, the scenography, the building, etc. The demands are varied and this solution has made it easier for us to operate," adds Paul Guiteau.

Finally, the Semitour benefits from a 3-year HPE Proactive Care contract backed by a 4-hour response time. HPE Proactive Care also helps with ongoing support and maintenance, as well as recommendations for firmware and software upgrades, and much more. For the company, this is essential because HPE SimpliVity is at the heart of its activity and now hosts all the sales, administrative, and IT activities.

In the months to come, Semitour plans to modernize the network infrastructure at two pilot sites that must have an operational guarantee of some kind to ensure operation. "HPE support was also one of the strengths of our technical upgrade plan. Today, everything is working perfectly and the regular updates allow us to continue to optimize the operation of our sites," concludes Paul Guiteau.

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