

•• FlexPod

FlexPod

Review From A Customer

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Data Center Manager at a consultancy with 5,001-10,000 employees

DataCente1bb

WHAT IS OUR PRIMARY USE CASE?

We are using it in two cases. We are using it for a database solution, so we're moving all of our 12G database systems onto Oracle UCS with flash as the hot store. We are still using spinning disk as the cold store. Initial tests are going really well. We're actually moving our first big load on in a couple of weeks. We are using Oracle VM Citrix-based hypervisor, full solution, with FlexPod as the repo on the back-end. All the guest nodes are running on UCS B200 M4s. We have A700, A300, and A200 on the back-end for various slavers and pulls, and they are all working great. We just put our first full workloads on it about a month ago. Since then, everyone has been saying after booting it, this was their fastest startup ever in that environment. Thus, it is working well so far.

HOW HAS IT HELPED MY ORGANIZATION?

For the management side of our UCS, it is a single pane of glass for multiple people, whether it is data center, sysadmin, or server deployment. On the UCS side for server profile, there is a type of layer of abstraction from the actual hardware. It is a lot easier to do hardware replacement, as long as you are Fibre Channel booting, you can just replace hardware which breaks and have things come right back online. Flash obviously just adds speed and bandwidth to everything.

WHAT IS MOST VALUABLE?

The most valuable features in a data center, or parts of it, are footprint and power consumption. The flash side is the first time that Moore's Law breaks. It gets smaller, and also takes less power.

WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT?

We have had a bit of struggle on the support side. I am not looking into the next iterations of it yet, because we are still standing up some parts of what we have now. I would like to see the partnership with NetApp and Cisco continue. We have been a NetApp shop for a long time. We have seen partner agreements between NetApp and tech companies fall apart over time. They were with Hitachi for a while, then 3Par for a while, and so on. However, we have a lot vested in Cisco and NetApp now. We would like to see the Flexpod service agreement strengthen as we continue to benefit on the customer side. We like NetApp and Cisco. I do not want to have to figure out how to make either of them work once they have decided to part ways. Therefore, it is important to us that they hold together.

FOR HOW LONG HAVE I USED THE SOLUTION?

Less than one year.

WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE STABILITY OF THE SOLUTION?

We are pretty new, but so far, we have not had issues on the flash side. We just moved our first production workloads onto it about six to eight weeks ago. We did not find MTBF early.

WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE SCALABILITY OF THE SOLUTION?

We purchased what we needed, so there is some room for scalability. We went big with the A700, thus we are using the 15TB SSDs. So far, so good.

HOW IS CUSTOMER SERVICE AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT?

From a customer perspective, it has been up to us to make sure that we get both NetApp and Cisco involved when we have had an issue. Unfortunately, we cannot just contact one side and they contact the other vendor to sort of work it out in the background, leaving you in the loop. We are interested in what is going on, but we have felt that we have had to pull the two sides together to make the FlexPod service side of it work to our benefit. They have worked with us to sort things out. Admittedly, we are running the bleeding edge of things. We are using Oracle UEK, which was not necessarily on either side's support matrix right upfront. Therefore, we have had some issues getting both sides' corporate to play nice. Eventually, it did get sorted out, and we are getting these things resolved.

WHICH SOLUTIONS DID WE USE PREVIOUSLY?

We previously worked with physical servers. We had a lot of HPE c7000 class. We started with RLX, which was pre-HPE. HPE bought them. We have played with the P class and C class, doing a couple different proven concepts along the way. We had Dell and Cisco, and some other people all come in, and they taught their stuff. This time around, from the managed solution side of it, Cisco is what sold us. Hardware is hardware, but how you put the solution together was the selling point for us. To be able to get something saying, "You build it like this." Not, you have a bunch of parts, what do you want to do with it? This is what a lot of the other vendors are still doing. They are tailoring hardware to your workload after you have bought hardware. As opposed to finding the solution you need, helping you build it upfront, presenting the hardware and dock, then showing you how to build it. This is what is nice for us. While a little rough, once you have built it, the support matrix says, "Here is newest version of firmware. Here is newest version of something else." Then, off you go. They do not necessarily take all iterations of change back to the lab to recertify them. You work with the vendor partnership to keep you in compliance going forward. This is one of the reasons that I want to see the NetApp and Cisco partnership hold together. Otherwise, we are right back where we were before. NetApp has an update and Cisco has an update, and neither one of them have tested it with each other.

HOW WAS THE INITIAL SETUP?

Setup was pretty easy. This was our first venture into UCS at all. It was a steep learning curve figuring it out. We are using Central to manage six different domains, so getting that hierarchy put together upfront so we could do global templating across all those domains was a little rough, mostly from a conceptual standpoint. It deploys easily now that we have got it out. We have been a NetApp shop forever, so that part was a piece of cake.

WHAT'S MY EXPERIENCE WITH PRICING, SETUP COST, AND LICENSING?

Make sure that you engage as much with whom you are buying from as a partnership, not just as a purchase.

WHICH OTHER SOLUTIONS DID I EVALUATE?

We did a PoC with four different vendors to test out combinations of a hardware build. Storage was kind of a given as we have been a NetApp shop forever. We have gone through a couple other ones. We really like 3PAR, but that's a different story.

WHAT OTHER ADVICE DO I HAVE?

The hardware has been rock solid so far. It has gone up easy. It runs well. We have not had issues with it. Pay attention to what you need upfront as you are building it. Know the workload that you are trying to solve with it. Make sure you are buying for performance, not just capacity. Most important criteria when selecting a vendor: It is important that they care about the business that we do after sale. It is one thing to get a quote, obtain the parts, and make sure you have all the right things upfront. Your business is going to change the next day, especially for a business like us. We are in a multi-customer type of environment where somebody will have a new bright idea tomorrow. Therefore, we need to be adaptable. It is important to have a partnership with the people that we purchase from. Thus, ongoing modifications can continue to be part of the conversation, not just, "I sold you something. Let me know when it is time to renew your contract."