Banking on 'Green' IT

Verteks helps support First Green Bank's mission through earth-friendly technology solutions and top-notch support.

A lot of organizations have launched "green" initiatives in order to become more environmentally responsible. First Green Bank has a green *mission*. The bank promotes environmental responsibility among area businesses through lower interest rates for commercial projects that meet green building standards. It also leads by example through its use of environmentally friendly products and technologies.

Verteks Consulting has played a key role in supporting First Green Bank's values and mission. Verteks has helped First Green Bank take advantage of cutting-edge communication, collaboration and virtualization solutions that reduce power consumption, travel between branch locations and other environmental impacts.

When First Green Bank started looking for a phone system, it evaluated products from several major vendors. The bank settled on the ShoreTel IP Communications solution primarily because of its energy efficiency, and partnered with Verteks for its ShoreTel expertise. Now First Green Bank relies upon Verteks for ongoing support and to help ensure that the bank gets the greatest value from its technology investments.

"We really like the power requirements of the ShoreTel system — the draw on the phones themselves as well as the switches. It really spoke to us from an environmental standpoint," said Daniel Dean, IT, Security Officer and Assistant Vice President, First Green Bank. "Verteks came in and gave us a demo, and I was sold — not only

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on ShoreTel but on Verteks. I started ordering more and more equipment from them."

Calling for Energy Efficiency

Based in Mount Dora, Fla., with branches in Clermont and Ormond Beach, First Green Bank promotes environmental and social responsibility while providing excellent service. Its Mount Dora headquarters, which opened on November 14, 2011, boasts a sustainable architectural design that includes a butterfly roof, low-water-consumption plumbing, solar power, water storage cisterns, Florida-friendly landscaping, recycled building materials, natural lighting, electric vehicle charging stations and many other earth-friendly features. Future branch locations will be built to similar standards.

What's more, every decision the bank makes has an environmental factor — including the selection of its phone system. And with ShoreTel, the bank didn't have to sacrifice features to gain environmental benefits.

"We had a clean slate and wanted to go with the best," Dean said. "And we've been very happy with the ShoreTel system overall. Being able to extension dial between branches is fantastic. And Verteks has always been there to help us work through any little kinks."

Verteks also handles warranty hardware support for First Green Bank, saving the bank time and money.

"We have a service agreement with ShoreTel, and if there's any kind of issue with the hardware Verteks comes out and replaces it immediately," said Dean. "It's nice to know that we don't have to buy two of everything and have it on site, ready to go. Verteks keeps it in stock for us, which is very helpful from a budgetary standpoint."

Seeing Green

First Green Bank also called upon Verteks to implement a LifeSize videoconferencing system. Videoconferencing minimizes travel between the branches and enables the bank's board of directors to participate in meetings remotely.

"We have a LifeSize system at each of our three branch locations," Dean said. "Our main branch here in Mount Dora has a larger system that can call our Ormond and Clermont branches simultaneously and bring up the videoconference on multiple screens. We can even display our desktop computer that's built into the conference room on the Life-Size system.

"We're currently working with Verteks on a mobile solution that will enable our directors to dial in to a video-conference from their iPads."

Dean says the LifeSize system is easy to use and offers great picture quality.

"We have one-touch buttons for almost every feature of the LifeSize System — it's very handy," he said. "And it's a high-definition system. We're running ours at 720p just to save on bandwidth, but it's crystal-clear HD quality. I've been impressed."

Ease of use is important for a growing bank with a two-person IT staff. Dean relies on the experts at Verteks to streamline technology deployments and help ensure that everything functions optimally.

"We lean heavily on them when it comes to new technologies, especially ShoreTel and LifeSize," he said.

Think Globally, Act Locally

When First Green Bank opened in February 2009, it deployed a traditional data center with each business application running on a physical server. Since then, the bank has implemented virtualization technology that has enabled it to cut the number of servers by two-thirds — saving power, cooling and space.

"When we opened, we weren't completely comfortable with virtualization," said Dean. "Now we have converted our data center from physical to virtual servers. In a traditional environment we would have 15 physical servers at this location but with virtualization we have five.

"Verteks helped us implement an HP storage area network that allows us to run our virtual servers off of one appliance. That has helped us a lot. And Verteks definitely has met our expectations when it comes to price and value."

While First Green Bank is eco-friendly, it is also a busy community bank dedicated to serving the needs of its clients and shareholders. IT is vital to the bank's day-to-day operations, and Verteks helps keep it running through reliable and responsive support.

"I have dealt with a number of their techs and they all are very capable," Dean said. "If they don't know the answer, they'll go find the answer and call me back very shortly."

Verteks has become a part of First Green Bank's mission to promote environmental and social responsibility. Verteks supports First Green Bank's business needs and goals through earth-friendly technologies and responsive, expert support.

Developers Embrace HTML5

Even though the HTML5 standard is still a work in progress, software developers are already committed to it, Evans Data's newest Global Development Survey shows. The survey of more than 1,200 developers conducted worldwide showed current use of HTML5 at 43 percent in North America, 39 percent in EMEA and 58 percent in the APAC region. Adding in planned use brought the totals to over three-quarters across the regions.

"There isn't any question about the adoption of HTML5, it's already the de facto standard," said Janel Garvin, CEO of Evans Data, "There is special strength in HTML5 for mobile and cross-platform mobile apps, which is the direction the industry is moving for client devices, and that has made it extremely attractive to developers everywhere in the world."

Mobile Security Education Lacking

While almost three-fourths of U.S. consumers are aware of — and concerned about — security threats to their smartphones, they aren't always taking active measures to protect their mobile lives, according to a survey conducted in December 2011 by NQ Mobile, a provider of consumer-centric mobile security and productivity applications, and the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA), a nonprofit public-private partnership focused on cyber-security awareness and education.

People are especially concerned about the personal information they keep on their phones, with nine out of 10 aware that smartphones contain personal information, and 81 percent concerned about that fact. Seventy-eight percent are particularly concerned about their lost or stolen phone falling into the wrong hands and its contents being misused.

Windows Shopping

Don't skip Windows 7 migration while waiting for Windows 8, analysts say.

The decade-old Windows XP remains the No. 1 operating system in use today as organizations have dragged their feet on upgrading to Windows 7. With the release of Windows 8 just around the corner, many are wondering if they can just skip the Windows 7 migration altogether.

That would be a bad move, industry analysts say.

"Windows 8 is an ambitious product, and organizations running late with Windows 7 may be considering it," Gartner analysts wrote in a recent research note. "However, enterprises running XP should stick with Windows 7 migration plans to avoid the risk of a gap in support."

XP currently accounts for 47.19 percent of the global OS market, compared to 36.4 percent for Windows 7, according to research firm Net Applications. The clock is ticking on XP, however. Microsoft support for XP ends in April 2014, at which time security patches and other updates will no longer be available.

Don't Wait for 8

Windows 8, meanwhile, should be ready to ship in late 2013. That might give individuals plenty of time to upgrade their home computers before XP support runs out, but enterprise organizations with hundreds or thousands of workstations still running on XP would almost certainly face a gap in support before Windows 8 could be fully deployed.

Enterprise organizations require significant preparation for a major OS migration. The typical organization requires 12 to 18 months of testing and planning before it can start deploying a new client OS. Organizations must be sure older PCs have enough memory, disk space and graphics power to accommodate the new OS. There can also be driver compatibility issues, particularly for those migrating from XP. A key upfront step is creating a working backup of all data, programs and files. Those migrating from XP will have to do a "clean install" of the new OS, wiping out everything on the hard drive.

Waiting for Windows 8 could also expose an organization to unnecessary risk. Unlike Windows 7, which was released nearly three years ago, Windows 8 has no track record. Windows 7 has been generally very well received, with marked improvements in usability, security and networking. A migration to Windows 7 now will give organizations more time to evaluate Windows 8. In fact, businesses would have the luxury to wait until the first service pack emerges some six to nine months after the Windows 8 release to ensure that any potential glitches are fixed.

Phased Approach

The general consensus among industry experts is that the sooner organizations can transition to Windows 7, the better their chances of avoiding potentially significant problems. To ensure the migration goes as smoothly as possible, Symantec offers the following seven-step path to deployment.

Asses your environment and plan your deployment. Discover devices across the network and capture inventory. Determine hardware readiness through reports. Prioritize applications to test and migrate. Evaluate costs and SLAs, and identify potential risks

Build standard Windows 7 images. Create standard images with settings and configuration for multiple users. Include applications that are required on all computers in the

base image. Create a generic image that can be deployed onto any PC regardless of its hardware.

Prepare and verify applications. Identify the applications supported on Windows 7. Test applications on Windows 7 and with each other to ensure compatibility in your environment. Remediate issues through policies, packaging, virtualization or—if absolutely necessary—debugging and code changes.

Capture user settings and personality. If there's one thing that makes or breaks an OS migration, it's the successful transfer of each computer and end-user's unique network, operating system, application and data settings, along with other customizations. In this step, identify global settings to migrate (printer and network drive mappings, favorites, security settings, etc.); determine application settings to migrate, including custom applications; include data to be moved or require end-users to transfer; and communicate with end-users about things that won't be migrated (e.g. MP3 files).

Assemble and automate. Now that the pieces are in place, you need to hook them together and encapsulate the templates and files into an automated job or a workflow sequence. This ensures that when one task completes, the next is triggered automatically. Create a process flow that includes the following steps: Deploy the image; install prepared applications; capture personality settings; restore personality settings.

Migrate systems. Position any additional servers purchased as part of the deployment plan. Make any required network adjustments, such as enabling multicasting. Identify test candidates. Document test cases. Create a phased pilot. Perform the migration.

Measure and report. Post-migration reporting and analysis will enable your executive team to track the migration from a distance and help you analyze key aspects of the migration. In this step, identify the total number of migrated systems; report problems encountered during migration; provide overall migration status; verify licenses.

Many organizations will likely find that the migration process is too complex and requires far more labor and time than they can commit using only internal resources. Given the increasingly tight time frame, Gartner says organizations should move quickly to line up outside resources for qualified Windows 7 migration IT personnel.

"We estimate that large and midsize organizations worldwide will migrate approximately 250 million PCs to Windows 7 during the migration timeline, so it makes sense for organizations that plan to leverage external services to line up service providers early," said Charles Smulders, managing vice president at Gartner. "Begin talks with suppliers now about putting in place contracts that can deliver flexible levels of resources at a fixed rate over the migration period."

Windows 8 Preview Available

Microsoft's upcoming Windows 8 will be a radical departure from its operating system legacy, featuring a new interface designed for touchscreen, mouse, keyboard and pen input. Although Windows 8 devices may not be ready to ship until 2013, a "consumer preview" version can be downloaded for free at http://preview.windows.com.

These are some of the more prominent new features in Windows 8:

The new "Metro" interface features big, colorful tiles that the user can swipe and touch — similar to the way one would on a Windows Phone device. The tiles differ from traditional desktop icons by letting users view live information from Windows 8 Metro-style applications without actually accessing the apps. For instance, a tile for Windows Live Mail will show the latest message, while a tile for a social networking app will show notifications.

Windows 8 will be closely linked with the cloud. Users can log in through the cloud using a Windows Live ID, which makes their email, calendar, contacts and anything they've stored on SkyDrive available to them on any machine they sign into and also automatically syncs all of that stuff across all of their devices.

The OS will include a redesigned version of the Internet Explorer web browser. There are actually two versions of IE 10. One is a Metro-style app and more locked down and constrained while providing a unique, full-screen browsing experience that will be useful on tablets and other highly mobile devices. The other is a traditional desktop application that looks and works much like its predecessor and is fully extensible with third-party add-ons.

For people who are increasingly mobile, Windows 8 includes Windows To Go — the ability to provide users with a full corporate copy of Windows 8 (along with users' business apps, data and settings) on a USB storage device. Windows 8 also includes improvements to DirectAccess and built-in mobile broadband features that natively support 3G and 4G telecommunication. And Windows 8 can stay always connected with Metro style apps.

Windows 8 will also feature advances in virtualization designed to make it easier for IT departments to implement virtual desktop infrastructures in a more cost-effective way. In addition, Windows 8 includes Microsoft Hyper-V, a high-performing client virtualization technology that enables enterprise developers to develop, debug and test multiple configurations of apps and operating systems on a single PC instead of each configuration requiring its own PC.

Cyber Warfare

More than 90 percent of security professionals are concerned that Advanced Persistent Threats pose a unique, major threat to U.S. vital interests.

I t's a wonder that IT security professionals get any sleep. According to a recent research report by Enterprise Strategy Group, a majority of midsize to large U.S.-based corporations believe they've been the targets of sophisticated cyber attacks known as Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs). What's more, a majority believe they may be attacked again.

APTs are a type of sophisticated cyber attack used by hackers to steal sensitive data. The term "APT" originated in the U.S. Air Force but came into the cyber security lexicon through its association with a cyber attack known as "Titan Rain." In that 2003 attack, hackers gained access to and stole data from organizations such as Lockheed Martin, NASA and Sandia National Labs. APTs have gained notoriety recently because of well-publicized cyber attacks in public and private-sector organizations such as Google (2010 compromise of Gmail) and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (2011 attempted compromise of systems containing nuclear energy research).

Unfortunately, APTs are not limited to military, intelligence and high-technology targets. On the contrary, APTs are occurring within nearly every industry.

'Most Prepared' Are Vulnerable

The Enterprise Strategy Group research report, titled "U.S. Advanced Persistent Threat Analysis," is based upon data gathered from a survey of 244 security professionals working at enterprise organizations (i.e., more than 1,000 employees) in the U.S. According to the report, 59 percent of the survey respondents are "certain" or "fairly certain" that their organizations have been the target of a previous APT attack. Furthermore, 72 percent of organizations believe they are a "highly likely" or "somewhat likely" target of future APT attacks.

The research also indicates that many organizations are not adequately protected against future attacks: Nearly one-third of the large organizations surveyed believe that they are vulnerable to future APTs. Even the 46 percent of large organizations that ESG categorized as "most prepared for APTs" (based upon their existing security policies, procedures and technical safeguards) say they are vulnerable to future sophisticated attacks.

Respondents said they believed the following groups (in order of significance) posed the greatest security threat to

their organizations: Political "hacktivists" (i.e., organizations that use computer hacking as a form of protest or civil disobedience), organized criminals, competitors conducting industrial espionage, foreign governments and terrorists.

"Security professionals who understand the threat landscape best readily admit that their organizations are not only under attack but also vulnerable," said Jon Oltsik, senior principal analyst at ESG and the primary author of the report. "Even more frightening, the companies that have already taken proper steps to secure their assets still believe they are vulnerable to APTs. If those organizations with strong cyber-security policies are vulnerable to APT attacks, it's safe to conclude that nearly all organizations are vulnerable."

Sound the Alarm

The report presents other alarming data. For example, 93 percent of security professionals working at enterprise organizations are either "extremely concerned" or "concerned" about APTs and the impact that APT attacks could have on vital U.S. interests such as national security and the economy. Overall, the data presented in the ESG research report indicates that large U.S.-based organizations may not be adequately prepared for an APT onslaught. Given this situation, the report offers a number of recommendations.

IT professionals are advised to educate executive managers about APT risks, assess their existing security defenses, and bolster security analysis and forensic skills. Technology vendors should create comprehensive security architectures offering centralized management and distributed enforcement. Finally, the U.S. Congress must aggregate cyber security bills and extend federal programs and resources to a wider audience.

"Security professionals have the most knowledge about and experience with APTs," Oltsik added. "This group believes that APTs are real, unique and extremely dangerous. It is imperative that business executives, IT managers, law enforcement officials and legislators recognize the risks, accept this warning, understand what's at stake and begin to address cyber security weaknesses as soon as possible. The longer we delay, the more damage we will likely incur."

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