

Carlin Music boosts performance and energy-efficiency with Northdoor and IBM

Overview

■ The Challenge

Improve performance and increase capacity of core financial and music royalty management systems; create more robust and scalable infrastructure; expand Intel® processor-based server landscape without increasing power consumption, heat output and floorspace requirements.

■ The Solution

Worked with IBM Premier Business Partner Northdoor to implement an IBM System i525 for core business systems, two IBM System x3550 servers running VMware virtualisation software, and a storage area network based on an IBM System Storage DS3400.

■ The Benefits

Significant performance increase with i525 – a business process that previously took two hours to run now completes in just 35 minutes; x3550 servers with virtualisation reduce power consumption and heat output while enabling growth in server numbers.



Carlin Music (www.carlinmusic.com) is the world's leading independent music publisher, with a catalogue that spans 100 years of popular music history. The 150,000 titles published by Carlin include numerous number one hits on both sides of the Atlantic, and the company continues to actively sign and develop new writing talent. Founded in 1966, Carlin today has operations in the UK, USA, Canada, France and Germany.

A major part of Carlin's business is licensing songs in its catalogue for sampling or re-recording by other artists. To keep track of the catalogue and ensure that all licensing is correctly managed, Carlin's UK division uses a third-party music royalty management system running on the IBM System i platform. The company's core financial systems run on the same platform, while office productivity applications and Web-based applications run on Intel processor-based servers.

Steve Phillips, IT Manager at Carlin Music, comments: "We wanted to improve the performance of our core business systems and create a more scalable environment to manage the growth of our business. The existing System i server was still working perfectly, but we had expanded it to the limit in terms of memory and disk capacity. At the same time, we aimed to introduce virtualisation in our Intel environment so that we could rationalise and consolidate our server landscape."

Adding performance to reliability

Carlin opted to work with Northdoor, an IBM Premier Business Partner, to optimise both parts of its IT infrastructure. The first stage was to implement a new IBM System i525 and migrate the existing software to it. Northdoor handled every step, from the sizing and configuration of the i525, through to physical installation and software migration.



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"We are a relatively small business, and we aim to build long-term relationships with trusted suppliers – so it's very important to find external providers that fit well with our corporate culture," says Steve Phillips. "Northdoor immediately impressed us with their professionalism, personal approach and technical skills. The upgrade to the i525 ran extremely well: the upgrade path for System i is one of the best out there in my opinion, and the new features like the virtual tape drives are a great benefit. Equally, the phenomenal reliability of the System i platform is the main reason that we continue to use it."

The new i525 had an immediate positive effect, significantly boosting performance. One processing job that previously took up to two hours to run now completes in around 35 minutes, enabling more timely reporting and minimising the impact on users, who also experience better response times.

More servers, smaller footprint

Carlin has a small server room in its UK office, and the steady growth of the Intel processor-based environment in terms of the floorspace, power and cooling it required was becoming a cause for concern. As heat output grew over the course of three years, the company had first upgraded its air-conditioning unit, then added a second as an emergency standby, and finally activated the second on a permanent basis. This was an unsustainable growth path, particularly given the rapid rises in the cost of electricity.

"Our US business had opted to virtualise its servers using VMware, and we made a strategic decision to follow the same policy," says Steve Phillips. "The primary goal was to have consistency between the two architectures, but a secondary goal was to enable growth in server numbers within the tight physical constraints of our existing server room. As we grow the virtual server landscape on our IBM x3550 servers, our air conditioning requirements will remain practically the same and we will not need to purchase any new physical hardware. In this way, virtualisation will enable us to make significant cost savings versus expanding a physical environment."

The IBM System x3550 servers installed by Northdoor each have two quad-core Intel Xeon processors, and are linked to an IBM DS3400 for all their data storage requirements. When the solution is fully deployed, Carlin will use VMotion technology from VMware to create a high-availability cluster across the two x3550s. This will enable live virtual servers to be moved from one physical machine to the other in the event of failure or planned maintenance on one of the x3550s.

"With server virtualisation on IBM System x, we can do a lot more useful work within the same floorspace and power envelope," says Steve Phillips. "Carlin takes its carbon footprint seriously, and this infrastructure refresh will make a contribution to improving our energy efficiency."