

Dimension Data keeps V/Line on Track

V/Line Passenger Pty Ltd

industry:

Transport

country:

Australia

business challenge:

The need to consolidate and secure end-of-life database servers to prevent the outage of core business applications

solution:

Consolidating dispersed critical business applications onto a central platform and provide greater availability, performance, accessibility and recovery

services:

- SQL Server 2005 upgrade, environment design, consolidation
- Comprehensive high availability and disaster recovery solution
- Migration services for 45 database systems and applications onto two three-node clustered SQL servers configured with database mirroring

results:

- Successful SQL upgrade achieved on time and within budget
- No disruption to everyday operations
- Improved availability, performance, accessibility and recovery

Executive Summary

V/Line Passenger Pty Ltd's (V/Line) SQL Server platform was in need of replacement, but with **45 different applications to migrate**, it was a complex project. V/Line called in Dimension Data to help with the migration, followed by **managed services to completely outsource** all ongoing database management and **provide peace of mind** to IT staff.

Client Overview

As the State's regional public transport provider, V/Line runs more than 1400 train services and 600 coach services every week, helping a potential 1.3 million regional Victorian customers get from place to place. More than 1200 people are employed by V/Line across Victoria. Fully owned by the State, V/Line is responsible to the Minister for Public Transport and funded on a not-for-profit basis. V/Line is also now responsible for the operation and maintenance of 4100 kilometres of rail track across Victoria and into New South Wales. To give an idea of volume, during 2006/07, V/Line transported 9.37 million customers 8.85 million rail passengers and 521,000 by coach.

Business Challenge

V/Line was running SQL Server 2000, which hosted the organisation's critical applications, including those actually running train services. An upgrade was required for a number of reasons: to consolidate dispersed critical business applications onto a central platform as well as provide greater availability, performance, accessibility and recovery. While the older version was not creating problems for the organisation, V/Line realised the need to keep up-to-date, as well as secure a server that was easy to maintain. In addition, the older SQL server platform was no longer supported by Microsoft, so a suitable upgrade path was becoming vital.

Relationship History

While V/Line had no previous dealings with Dimension Data, it was attracted to the organisation's reputation, particularly in relation to SQL database services. An alternative vendor had been providing these services, however, it was not a specialised SQL server vendor. With 45 different applications to consolidate it was clearly a complex project and a provider with specialist expertise was going to be essential to the success of the project.

"Dimension Data was highly recommended by other people who have worked with us, especially project managers. Dimension Data was particularly recommended for its knowledge of SQL,"

said **Greg Kesby, IT Services Manager at V/Line.**

Initially Dimension Data provided SQL Professional Services, including a two month trial of Managed SQL Services. Satisfied with the trial, V/Line signed up for another 12 months of managed services, followed by a further extension of two years.

“This is a big insurance policy which helps keep the trains running. Otherwise, if the database failed at 3am, the trains wouldn’t run because drivers would refuse to drive without the information required to operate the trains.”

Greg Kesby, IT Services Manager at V/Line Passenger Pty Ltd.

Solution Delivered

The project involved a SQL Server 2005 upgrade, environment design, consolidation and high availability/ disaster recovery solution. No less than 45 database systems and applications were migrated onto two three node clustered SQL servers configured with database mirroring. Subsequent to the upgrade, Dimension Data is providing ongoing SQL Server Support Services. V/Line elected for “Gold” level services, which include a range of day-to-day database administrator (DBA) tasks, full 24x7x365 technical monitoring/alerting, management reporting and capacity planning.

In essence, Dimension Data performs the role of a proactive production DBA, with no internal V/Line resources required. The service also includes access to the SQL Management Portal, which is an easy-to-use interface available under all levels of the Managed SQL Services. By providing graphs, monitoring, reports, trend information, capacity planning and even an audit trail of the services provided by Dimension Data, the portal offers V/Line a high level of control and visibility.

How We Delivered

Such a complex upgrade involving so many diverse applications always had the potential to be difficult, but Mr Kesby reported that the project went smoothly, and any glitches were quickly resolved.

“The implementation went almost perfectly, and where there were hiccups Dimension Data resolved them. For example, working out a way for all the different systems to “talk” to each other and co-exist on the same platform. Any complexities that surfaced in terms of database operations were investigated and addressed, as were operational issues such as indexing,” said Mr Kesby. “In particular I had anticipated problems because one of the systems is maintained by a third party, requiring successful interaction between all three parties: V/Line, Dimension Data and the third party. Admittedly I was a bit nervous about that, and imagined all sorts of boundary rules and demarcation disputes. But once again Dimension Data’s people worked in with each group. They were very approachable and open to discussion, to the extent that I was waiting for the call telling me that we had an issue, but when the call came it was to say ‘it’s done!’”.

The upgrade occurred on time, within budget and V/Line has not experienced any operational concerns since.

Lack of feedback from the organisation was exactly what IT staff at V/Line wanted to hear:

“Staff didn’t even know the upgrade had happened. We would have heard within minutes if they weren’t happy – these applications are critical as they could stop the trains running,” explained Mr Kesby.

Value Derived

The upgrade has delivered a number of benefits for V/Line, ranging from peace of mind for IT staff through to improved redundancy and performance.

“If there is a catastrophe we are no longer reliant on the one particular employee who may or may not be available. This is a big insurance policy which helps keep the trains running. Otherwise, if the database failed at 3am, the trains wouldn’t run because drivers would refuse to drive without the information required to operate the trains,” said Mr Kesby.

Value has also been experienced in making people’s jobs easier and freeing them up for other tasks, as described by Mr Kesby:

“The ongoing support provided by Dimension Data’s monitoring and proactive management has made my job easier. It’s also freed up some of my time – previously I spent more time ensuring that things were actually running well.” The latest upgrade of SQL server has also provided greater functionality that did not exist in the previous version.

For example, increased redundancy and recovery is a by-product of the newer version’s database mirroring for disaster recovery. Previously V/Line had to rely on tape backup which was cumbersome, slow, and prone to data loss. With the database now mirrored elsewhere, the most that could be lost is merely seconds of data. Moreover, recovering data can be achieved easily and quickly. In the past Mr Kesby had worked with internal resources so had given serious consideration to bringing the SQL work in-house. “But once I looked at what Dimension Data did and saw the value of what it was offering, it made good sense to outsource the work. Ownership was a big thing to me – having someone with a stake in the project with something to lose if things didn’t go well. Dimension Data really buy into the whole process and act as though it’s their own.”

