Office Depot: Modernizes and saves over 40% in IT management costs with SUSE

After several acquisitions designed to diversify and strengthen its position in the marketplace, Office Depot's IT department was tasked with modernizing IT systems to support company growth. Leveraging SUSE solutions, they simplified management of a heterogenous environment and migrated IT operations to a public cloud to create better customer experiences.

Office Depot At-a-Glance:

Provides business services, products and digital workplace technology solutions to businesses of all sizes through retail, online and business-to-business operations.

Industry
- Retail/B2B/Technology Services

Product and Services
- SUSE Linux Enterprise Server
- SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Sale
- SUSE Linux Enterprise Expanded Support
- SUSE Manager for Retail
- SUSE Manager

Location
- Boca Raton, Florida, USA

Results
+ Saved over 40% in IT management costs
+ Simplified data center management allows more time to innovate better customer experiences
+ Reduced cost of retail store IT overhead, equating to a lower cost competitive position

Overview

Office Depot, a wholly owned subsidiary of The ODP Corporation, is a leading provider of business services, products and digital workplace technology solutions to small, medium and enterprise businesses. Through its banner brands Office Depot® and OfficeMax®, as well as others, the company offers its customers the tools and resources they need to focus on their passion of starting, growing and running their business through approximately 1,200 stores, an online presence and thousands of dedicated sales professionals.

Challenges

Office Depot's IT team was tasked to support the objective of driving company growth through generating better customer experiences, minimizing costs and maximizing the output of innovative solutions.

To begin, they looked at systems and processes already in place.

Due in part to assimilating businesses through the years, Office Depot houses a mixed vendor technology environment for running retail operations and their central data center. Upon review, the IT team recognized that simplifying its mixed environment would allow them to better standardize operations and spend

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Marshall Lew
Sr. Director of IT
Platform Engineering & Network Services
Office Depot

more time, budget and resources on developing innovative solutions for growth.

They also recognized that adopting a cloud-first strategy would assist in minimizing costs and helping them respond proactively to market changes. For example, running application development and deployment from the cloud would allow them to respond in record time, thereby generating better customer experiences.

However, relying solely on cloud-based operations comes with a unique set of risks. "As the world becomes more connected, institutions also become more vulnerable to cyberattacks," says Marshall Lew, Senior Director of IT, Platform Engineering and Network Services at Office Depot. "We had to become more vigilant in our processes to stay within our established security framework for the enterprise." In other words, they needed a solution that would keep their systems secure without unnecessarily escalating costs.

Solutions

When planning how to better manage their mixed environment and securely migrate operations to private cloud, the team evaluated several vendors, including the possibility of implementing and managing an open source-based solution themselves directly from the community. A SUSE customer since 2006, Office Depot was already familiar with SUSE's long history in the retail industry, commitment to open source and proven reliability. In the end, they determined SUSE solutions would help them reach their goals faster, safer and more cost-effectively.

"As we continue to build out our IT service offerings to our customers," says Lew when asked about

Figure 1: Office Depot Store Front

why they chose SUSE instead of running an open source solution themselves, "It is important to rely on companies like SUSE to deliver patches and help us stay one step ahead of the bad actors—it makes getting ROI easier."

Having used SUSE Linux Enterprise Server (SLES) to simplify and standardize its IT environment, Lew decided to use SLES as their primary operating system on private cloud and in their on-premise central data centers.

Lew says, "Improved agility was a critical piece in our decision making. SUSE Linux Enterprise Server gives us the ability to lay down applications much quicker than in a closed Unix environment and gives us an alternative to more costly, proprietary applications."

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> "By running a lean team with such a large infrastructure, it's important for us to have our resources focused on our customer needs instead of putting a lot of time, effort, and energy into managing the operating system assets and infrastructure in the cloud and on prem."

George Woods
Director of IT
Application Infrastructure
Office Depot

Now that the cloud infrastructure had been decided, the team made great strides in simplifying their mixed environment. Instead of ripping out legacy systems for a homogenous IT stack, Office Depot implemented SUSE Linux Enterprise Expanded Support to centralize patch management for over 350 Enterprise Servers.

They also decided to use SUSE Manager to schedule and push releases out to their 1,200+ store environments. They also launched SUSE Manager for Retail to automate updates for the in-store servers running over 5,000 point-of-sales registers. As a whole, SUSE now supports 85% of Office Depot's Unix/Linux workloads.

Results
By centralizing mixed-platform management into SUSE Manager, SUSE Manager for Retail and SUSE Linux Enterprise Expanded Support, Office Depot has saved over 40% in management costs. They have also been able to confidently move forward with their cloud-first strategy as SLES provides the needed stability and reliability in a hybrid-cloud scenario, whether it be in the cloud or on-premises with their legacy hardware.

"We really value the stability of the product itself," says George Woods, Director of IT for Application Infrastructure at Office Depot. "SUSE Linux Enterprise Server rarely has performance or bug issues that impact production. And again, this is the operating system powering most of our retail footprint. We are trusting a large portion of our revenue generating assets and IT by running on SUSE solutions."

When talking about SUSE Manager, Woods says, "SUSE Manager has been very reliable. That's one of

the things that helps keep our operating expenses and engineering costs down in order to support our business. That's what allows us to keep a relatively lean engineering team that is supporting 1,200+ servers and over 5,000 register end points. It's pretty remarkable."

The central Office Depot IT team has seen an impact on retail store overhead expenses, as well. "One of our key drivers is supporting our retail locations to be low-cost providers so they can remain competitive in the marketplace. Given the efficiency they're getting through SUSE's technology and support, we are not burdening retail stores with large overhead fees for IT support," says Woods.

He adds, "By running a lean team with such a large infrastructure, it's important for us to have our resources focused on our customer needs instead of putting a lot of time, effort, and energy into managing the operating system assets and infrastructure in the cloud and on prem."

And when asked about how SUSE has impacted the IT team Woods explains, "Even their time spent in the operations role will continue to move into the DevOps models. We're now able to reallocate more of their time along with our core engineers on staff to do more innovative development and value-added engineering activities, rather than just day-to-day operations."

By dropping costs over 40%, simplifying the management of their systems, and building a cloud infrastructure ripe for innovation, the IT team is primed for generating better customer experiences.

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