

A Strategic Approach to Modernizing IT Infrastructure

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

How thinking about infrastructure in a more strategic, future-looking manner transformed a major food distribution company's competitive position and enhanced its responsiveness to rapidly changing business conditions

This case study details the path that an enterprise-scale organization took to resolve limitations with current IT infrastructure and implement a modern platform for future needs in partnership with American Digital.

ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

The customer is one of the largest private-label food distributors in the United States. It is a member of the Fortune 500, with annual sales of over \$7 billion. The company has nearly doubled its revenue in a very short period of time, primarily through acquisitions of similar companies and those in allied industries. This hyper-growth resulted in a stronger competitive position, but it also brought to light substantial IT issues that needed resolution.

This customer is in a highly competitive industry segment that is characterized by high volume and low margins. As a result, there is a critical need for IT systems and infrastructure that can effectively support the organization's operations. The day-to-day demands of the company's operations required that its internal IT team stay focused on tactical business priorities, primarily new applications and services that improve logistics and supply-



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chain management. However, with internal resources focused in this way, the company found it needed to partner with an IT services organization to resolve strategic infrastructure issues and build a platform for the future.

THE CUSTOMER'S ISSUES

The organization faced two distinct IT issues: fixing the current infrastructure and deploying an IT platform that supported future needs. However, the actual catalyst for undertaking this project was substantial IT infrastructure problems. Perhaps the most impactful of these issues was the unacceptable amount of downtime, which caused business interruptions that reflected poorly on the IT organization. Coupled with the reliability issue, the complex and disparate legacy environment made it impossible to complete a successful disaster recovery (DR) test. Without a successful test, the company faced compliance and audit problems that were a red flag for management. Worse, coupled with excessive downtime, the lack of a working DR solution increased risk levels beyond what the organization could tolerate.

Beyond the reliability and system integrity issues, the legacy environment could not provide the level of performance necessary to support this rapidly growing organization. There were two primary examples of this problem. First, the organization had difficulty meeting monthly, quarterly and annual financial closes. Second, there was insufficient performance for new analytics workloads to support new processes designed to improve business results.

Additionally, there was a limited number of IT staff. With the number of acquisitions and substantial organic growth, the company had grown faster than the IT organization. In this highly competitive and tight-margin industry, heavy investments in IT staff could not be justified. Given the tactical business needs, IT became focused on daily operations only. For this reason, the IT organization needed a strategic partner that could provide not only the resources, but also the expertise to build the plan for a strategic platform migration.

SOLUTION DEFINITION

Given the broad scope and substantial impact this project would have on the organization, the company decided it would be most effective to develop the plan with their strategic IT partner American Digital. The starting point was a complete and thorough business review with their internal staff. This input identified necessary functionality for the new solution and also detailed existing issues in the current IT infrastructure. A key reason for selecting American Digital was its commitment to investing time and expertise into this phase of the project to ensure a successful outcome. The company needed a partner that would be intimately involved and develop a true partnership, not a technology sales relationship.

The solution definition that resulted from this joint effort included these requirements:

- **Provide 24x7x365 operations:** The organization's business runs around the clock, and it needed an IT infrastructure that could support this need and was designed to be highly reliable.



- **Integrate legacy vendors:** The company did plan to replace some core elements of the infrastructure, but it also wanted to focus on a small group of strategic vendors. This included Hewlett Packard Enterprise and SAP, among others.
- **Be able to conclude a successful DR test:** This was a top requirement. The importance of fixing the DR problem and being able to provide a working DR environment was essentially a “go/no-go” issue.
- **Migrate core infrastructure to a modern platform:** The partners chose to implement an x86/Linux/VMware platform and migrate from the existing IBM AIX infrastructure.
- **Support infrastructure consolidation:** Due to the many acquisitions, the company had a cornucopia of different products in use. Consolidating the many different platforms was necessary.
- **Reduce costs:** With many disparate systems and a high-cost legacy environment, the organization wanted the new IT infrastructure to reduce operating costs.
- **Deliver a five-year useful life for the new infrastructure:** The need for a substantial useful lifespan for the new infrastructure was critical. The customer wanted a solution that would provide a long-term platform.
- **Be able to scale:** This organization plans to continue to grow rapidly. The plan mandated 3x scaling for traditional workloads and 4x for SAP HANA without substantial new infrastructure investments.

- **Employ a private cloud architecture:**

The organization wanted to utilize cloud architecture, but they wanted to use a private cloud solution.

This solution definition was comprehensive and highly demanding. The budget of \$5 million reflected the importance and scale of the undertaking.

CHOOSING THE PARTNER

As noted above, the combination of resources and skills needed by the customer demanded a relationship with a true partner, not a vendor. Its partner of choice would also need to work with its strategic vendors in an efficient and productive manner. American Digital won this business by being the best partner. It proved its commitment to the organization with the substantial resources invested during the assessment phase, prior to the contract being awarded. It also took the extra step of ensuring that executive management was part of the process to foster IT and business alignment.

American Digital possessed the expertise to fix the current IT infrastructure problems, in addition to building a “future state” for IT infrastructure. American Digital’s ability to meet both demands was an additional reason why the customer chose them.

It is also interesting to note that price was not the primary decision point for choosing a partner. The customer realized that success and partnership were going to be the driving factor, and saving a few dollars to risk project success was a poor trade-off.

RESULTS

The customer has been exceedingly pleased by the results of the project. As their spokesman noted, “American Digital is unlike any other vendor we have used in our history. Their attention to detail and ability to proactively remedy situations before they happen is unique. They pitched a solution based on our current environment. Where we were on Day One and where we would be post SAP HANA upgrade. They delivered on every promise.”

American Digital delivered results that were driven by the specific, critical customer needs, including:

- Multiple successful DR tests
- No meaningful downtime in three years
- Met or exceeded all SLAs
- Cost surprises are very rare
- Infrastructure is now ready for a full roll out of SAP HANA

Most importantly, American Digital has proven to be the true partner that the company wanted. The relationship is quite strong and enhanced by meeting the customer’s needs every day.

“American Digital is available to our team 24/7, and their level of competency and professionalism are valuable to any organization,” the company’s spokesperson continued. “We have had zero production outages over the past three years. The unmatched expertise of American Digital, coupled with our extreme level of satisfaction with their support services and dedicated team, is why we chose to renew our agreement.”

SUMMARY

When a Fortune 500 organization faces the twin tasks of fixing the current infrastructure and deploying an environment to meet future demands, it is a major undertaking. The project touched nearly every aspect of IT infrastructure, and with internal IT staff that did not have sufficient resources to complete the project, the customer needed a true partner.

American Digital brought the technical expertise and skills necessary to implement the project. More importantly, it invested in its customer’s success with its own resources and staff. The result is a highly successful project that has positioned the customer to succeed and grow the business.

ABOUT AMERICAN DIGITAL

American Digital is a Chicago-based enterprise IT solutions partner focused on data center transformation. The company takes a personal and consultative approach, working with clients to learn about their business objectives and current processes to effectively determine the ideal solutions for their organization. American Digital wants to help businesses build a more cost-efficient IT strategy that can improve efficiency and support future growth.