Auburn University

Fast Facts

Auburn University was established in 1856 as the East Alabama Male College, 20 years after the city of Auburn's founding. With more than 25,000 students, Auburn University offers more than 140 degree options in 13 schools and colleges at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels.

Auburn's schools and colleges include: College of Agriculture; College of Architecture, Design & Construction; Harbert College of Business; College of Education; Samuel Ginn College of Engineering; School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences; Graduate School; Honors College; College of Human Sciences; College of Liberal Arts; School of Nursing; Harrison School of Pharmacy; College of Sciences and Mathematics; College of Veterinary Medicine

Introduction

Auburn University has developed into one of the largest universities in the South, remaining at the educational forefront with its traditional blend of arts and applied science.

Auburn University earns its reputation as a premier public institution in part for how it embraces information technology – both to enhance the education, research and outreach service it provides, and to promote the economic vitality of the State of Alabama and the citizens it serves. To achieve these goals, Auburn University not only embraces state-of-the-art technology but equips its faculty, staff and students with the tools, training and support they need in the pursuit of their respective endeavors.

Challenges

Like most institutions of higher education, each college within Auburn University functions autonomously from one another with the respective dean deciding how best to appropriate their respective budgets and staff various departments in the interest of its students and programs.

In 2013, the College of Architecture, Design & Construction decided to streamline its IT department, elevating Joel Beckum to IT Coordinator from a position of desktop support. While Beckum had experience in managing and supporting the applications used in the department, he had little experience with back-end infrastructure. After surveying the college's IT infrastructure that was a couple of generations old, Beckum reached out to Phil Forrest, Information Technology Manager for the College of Sciences and Mathematics, to consult on how best to modernize within the imposed fiscal and personnel restraints.

"After an initial audit, I saw what I had and how little experience I had," said Beckum. "After some due diligence, I talked to several vendors. What Scale Computing told me really, really interested me. They are able to simplify my network infrastructure so that I can concentrate on applications and VMs. ."

Forrest, likewise, found his college's existing hardware was starting to show its age. With a Sun X4150 server, 2 IBM BladeCenter LS22s, 2 VDI servers and a variety of number-crunching systems, he needed a file server that could handle the complexities of VMware View and could be managed by his small staff of IT personnel. With the authorization of both college's deans to work together, Forrest also settled on Scale's HC3 solution.

"While VMware View works well, VMware can get complicated really fast," said Forrest. "With three people supporting 5,000 users – and no money for additional personnel – I had to find a solution that was super simple. Scale hits the sweet spot with what's possible. With its built-in hypervisor, I don't have to deal with or pay another vendor."

Solution

Scale Computing's HC3 platform brings storage, servers, virtualization and management together in a single, comprehensive system. With no virtualization software to license and no external storage to buy, HC3 products lower out-of-pocket costs and radically simplify the infrastructure needed to keep applications running. HC3 products make the deployment and management of a highly available and scalable infrastructure as easy to manage as a single server.

"Scale's HC3 solution does everything that I need it to," said Beckum. "It simplifies my network infrastructure so that I can be an expert. I was a desktop support guy who's now a system admin. Scale makes me look like a pro. As far as my users know, I'm a genius."

Forrest also appreciated HC3's simplicity as well as its built-in hypervisor. Unlike other solutions that require multiple vendors to supply the server, storage and virtualization, Scale Computing's HC3 virtualization platform is a complete "datacenter in a box" integrated into a single appliance.

"With the BYOH model, if something didn't work right, the software vendor would blame the hardware vendor and the hardware vendor blames the software vendor," said Forrest. "Scale provides a simple solution to this very common problem. If we did this the old school way, it would have been two to three times as much. Scale is so exciting, it's boring."

The colleges continue to move their existing infrastructure over to the Scale HC3 while getting faculty that is tied to the old way of doing things to adapt to the new virtualized environment. Each college is evaluating their future needs and are looking to integrate their Scale environments into Auburn University's active directory.

While Beckum and Forrest appreciate that their Scale solutions did "everything they claimed it could do," they say that with the success of their projects it isn't just about the hardware. Both men were equally impressed with the level of service and support they received from everyone at Scale.

"Support is top notch," said Beckum. "Even the sales guy will answer tech questions."

"I don't have to go through an offshore call center to get my technical support question answered," said Beckum. "I can go through Scale's customer portal or even call somebody directly to get my questions answered."

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