



Customer Solution Case Study



Web Services Firm Uses Shared Configuration, Reduces Server Setup Time by 80 Percent

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services – IT services

Customer Profile

Founded in 1995, Adhost provides server colocation and shared server hosting from two state-of-the-art data centers in Seattle, Washington. Its 30 employees support over 3000 business customers.

Business Situation

To maintain its competitive advantage, Adhost needed a solution that would reduce webmaster and administrative time, while enhancing security and affordability for its business clients.

Solution

Adhost deployed a pre-release version of Windows Server® 2008, both internally and for beta shared hosting. Using IIS 7.0, Adhost significantly reduced the amount of time needed for server configuration and administration. Adhost plans to deploy Windows Server 2008 for all new shared hosting after the February 2008 launch date.

Benefits

- Reduced site activation time by 75 percent
- Reduced server setup time by 4 hours
- Ability to delegate administrative rights
- Enhanced security, stability
- Support for PHP, FTP/SSL

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Mike Graves, Senior Windows System Administrator, Adhost

Adhost, a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, is one of the Pacific Northwest’s leading providers of server colocation and shared server hosting. It manages two high-tech data centers in Seattle, Washington, and serves over 3000 business customers across the region. Adhost built its first three Web farms using Windows Server® 2003, but after two years decided that it needed a solution that would substantially reduce server administration time while increasing extensibility and scalability for its customers. Adhost deployed Windows Server 2008 and began using the innovative enhancements of Internet Information Services (IIS) 7.0 technologies, including the Shared Configuration feature and IIS Manager tool. Using Windows Server 2008 and IIS 7.0, Adhost reduced server setup time by 80 percent (from five hours to one hour), decreased site activation time by 75 percent, and cut webmaster and administration time in half.

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Situation

Adhost Internet began offering a collection of Web services to business-class clients in 1995. The company now provides server colocation, Web site hosting, Web development services, server management, and e-commerce solutions to over 3000 customers across the Pacific Northwest. Adhost’s 30 employees maintain two fail-safe, state-of-the-art data centers in Seattle, Washington.

As one of the region’s leading providers of server colocation, shared server hosting, and dedicated server solutions, Adhost is constantly looking for new ways to maintain its competitive advantage by streamlining operations. In 2005, Adhost built its shared hosting environment based on the Windows Server® 2003 operating system with Internet Information Services (IIS) 6.0. “Our first three Web farms were based on Windows Server 2003 because they were built two years ago,” explains Mike Graves, Senior Windows System Administrator for Adhost. “With Windows Server 2003, it takes our system administrators about five hours to build a new box and get it into the cluster because of all the manual work they have to do within IIS 6.0 to make both configurations the same. And manual site set up can take as long as forty minutes. We needed a way to save time on these administrative tasks.”

In addition, Adhost’s dedicated hosting clients are looking for flexible, affordable solutions that grow along with their businesses. “A business may start out with one front-end Web server and one back-end SQL Server-based server,” Graves says. As the business grows, the client will want to add additional load or new applications without incurring prohibitive costs. “We never get the full specs at the beginning of a project,” Graves continues. “So we have to prepare for the unknown by offering

solutions that are as flexible and scalable as possible.”

Solution

When a pre-release version of Windows Server 2008 became available, Adhost was eager to test the new features and enhancements. First, it deployed Windows Server 2008 Standard 32-Bit internally on a Dell 1950 Quad Core server computer with Dual Intel Xeon 1.6GHz processor to run Windows® SharePoint® Services. “We’re using Windows SharePoint Services internally for project management, scheduling, and shared documents,” says Graves. “It was an easy install, easy to deploy on Windows Server 2008, and it integrates with our Active Directory, which means that everyone can log in. We manage it very easily.”

Adhost then created a fourth Web farm. “The fourth cluster is based on Windows Server 2008 Standard, which will be our main hosting cluster going forward,” says Graves. “Anything that’s going in new will be built on Windows Server 2008. With the Shared Configuration feature of IIS 7.0, we’ll just continue to add servers to that cluster.” With IIS 7.0, Adhost can store Web server configurations on a centralized file server and share them across a set of Web servers.

Adhost is also quoting and promoting Windows Server 2008 in all of its dedicated server proposals, “so the new dedicated offerings are probably going to be Windows Server 2008 as well,” adds Kurt Widmann, Sales Manager for Adhost.

One such proposal was made when a prospective dedicated server client approached Adhost and Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Cypress Consulting for help in building a new IT infrastructure. At first, the client was considering a solution

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stack that included Linux, Apache, MySQL, and PHP (known collectively as LAMP), but Adhost recommended Windows Server 2008. “The client went with a Windows Server solution because they needed Active Directory to handle multiple logins and users,” says Graves. “From a LAMP perspective, there’s no way to run Active Directory.”

The client specifically chose Windows Server 2008 after Adhost described its enhanced scalability. “We talked to them about the ability to add additional front-end Web servers and the ease of doing that with the Shared Configuration feature of IIS 7.0,” Graves explains. “As the business grows, the plan is to load balance additional Web servers on the front end to handle the increased load. This is something we simply couldn’t do before.”

Benefits

Adhost anticipates that using the innovative enhancements of IIS 7.0, including the Shared Configuration feature and the IIS Manager tool, the company will reduce server administration time by 50 percent, site activation time by 75 percent, and server setup by at least four hours per server. Adhost found two additional benefits in the enhanced security of the operating system and the fully integrated Web/file transfer protocol (FTP) server.

Substantial Time Savings

Adhost’s administrators can save up to four hours per server by using the Shared Configuration feature of IIS 7.0. “With Windows Server 2008 and the Shared Configuration feature of IIS 7.0, we can go from a bare bones box to a running Web server in about one hour—a four-hour savings over Windows Server 2003,” says Graves. “Site setup can be done in about a quarter of the time—10 minutes to activate a site via script versus 40 minutes. And

we’re expecting to cut our webmaster and administration time in half as well.”

Delegation of Administrative Rights

With the IIS Manager tool, Adhost can delegate administrative responsibilities with enhanced security to technical support staff. “We can delegate certain administrative functions to our support staff so they are able to do tasks for our customers like default documents and custom error pages—tasks that are fairly simple and not service-impacting,” Graves explains. Adhost can also delegate certain IIS administration tasks to the site owners themselves, “so they can connect to their Web site rather than to the whole server and administer just the IIS components within their site,” says Graves. “This is a capability that our clients have wanted for years.”

Extensibility and Scalability

Adhost is using the scalable shared hosting and load-balanced architecture of IIS 7.0 to increase server capacity without sacrificing reliability. “As our load grows, we simply add additional Web servers up front,” Graves explains. “I would say that the time savings of being able to bring a new Web server into a load-balanced cluster is probably four-fold.”

Developers like Adhost can use the fully modular architecture in IIS 7.0 to build applications on IIS 7.0 in the Web framework of their choice, including PHP, ASP.NET, ColdFusion, and PERL. “Being able to support peripheral components like PHP is going to be a big selling factor for us,” says Widmann.

Enhanced Security

Adhost is using the customizable installation of IIS 7.0 to minimize the attack surface and enhance the security of the operating system. “We create a smaller

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For more information about Adhost products and services, call (888) 234-6781 or visit the Web site at: www.adhost.com

footprint with IIS 7.0, which is important from both a memory point of view and a security point of view," says Graves. "In terms of stability, we've been running Windows Server 2008 for two months now and have been monitoring it every three minutes from five different Web servers. So far we haven't seen even a flicker of downtime."

In addition to enhanced security of the operating system, Adhost's clients have been asking for a security-enhanced FTP. "While files are being transferred to a Web server, it's essentially in clear text, which can pose security issues," Graves explains. "Now our clients can download FTP software and create a secure FTP connection to our IIS 7.0 FTP server. Secure FTP is something our customers really want, and now we can offer it to them."

Windows Server 2008

Windows Server 2008, with built-in web and virtualization technologies, enables you to increase the reliability and flexibility of your server infrastructure. New virtualization tools, web resources, and security enhancements help you save time, reduce costs, and provide a platform for a dynamic and optimized datacenter. Powerful new tools like IIS 7.0, Server Manager, and Windows PowerShell, allow you to have more control over your servers and streamline web, configuration, and management tasks. Advanced security and reliability enhancements like Network Access Protection and the Read-Only Domain Controller option for Active Directory Domain Services harden the operating system and protect your server environment to ensure you have a solid foundation on which to build your business.

For more information, go to: www.microsoft.com/windowsserver2008

Software and Services

- Microsoft® Server Product Portfolio
 - Windows Server® 2008 Standard
 - Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition
 - Microsoft SQL Server® 2005
- Services
 - Windows® SharePoint® Services
- Technologies
 - Internet Information Services (IIS) 7.0
 - Active Directory®
 - Terminal Services

Hardware

- Two Dell 1950 Quad Core
- Dual Intel Xeon 1.6Ghz
- 4 GB RAM
- SCSI RAID1 10k drives

Partners

- Cypress Consulting