

## New IBM Server Solution Makes The Grade

*Polaris Career Center positions itself for future IT growth*



### Highlights:

#### PROBLEMS

- Overcrowded IT facility
- Limited capacity
- Slow response
- Reduced performance
- No growth path

#### SOLUTIONS

- Smaller footprint servers
- 14 times more powerful than one previous server
- Faster and more responsive
- Scalable for future growth

Growth is the key word for Polaris Career Center. Growth through education for its students. Growth for the organization through expanding curriculums and enrollment. And consequently, growth for its IT resources to support it all.

When this career-oriented school for secondary and adult students in the Cleveland suburb of Middleburg Heights began to re-examine its IT environment, the problems the IT staff wanted to resolve were all too evident.

#### The Problems

The server room (a converted classroom) had gone from having three servers to 21 servers in seven years. They were not only running out of space on the servers, they were running out of *floor and rackspace*. But Frank Olle, IT Coordinator for Polaris, put a premium on what they needed a new technology solution to do for them. "We have really put an emphasis on making technology an integral part of our education experience," Olle said, "and we needed storage space, uptime and equipment that we could rely on and that would grow with us."

The servers that supported the educational institution were no longer meeting the needs of the organization.

The system was overloaded, causing costly downtime and slower response time for student and faculty users. This limited the ways the IT department could serve its customers and contribute to the growth of the organization.

Also key to serving its customers was providing a stable environment for two web-based applications used round-the-clock by Polaris faculty and students both on-site and across the globe (from Peru to Australia). On these applications, students develop their own web sites and resumes as a resource in their career planning, teachers upload files to work on from home, and class assignments are posted and delivered, to name just a small amount of the functionality available to the Polaris community. To support that, Olle needed more storage space, more uptime and equipment his IT team could rely on 24x7.

The organization had implemented a 1.5 Terabyte FASTT SAN in 2000 and wanted to better leverage the space sitting idle on the SAN, bringing everything up to specs while condensing its server space. In addition, an upgrade to a web-based application used by students and faculty alike was requiring a Linux server. For an

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*Frank Olle, IT Coordinator – Polaris Career Center*



educational IT organization where everyone “tends to be a generalist,” these were daunting decisions.

“We have to be masters of everything here,” admitted Olle. “You learn what you need to know and then move on to the next project. None of us can be specialists. But that’s what I found at Champion.”

Polaris Career Center looked to the locally-based experts at Champion Solutions Group in Ohio, an IBM Premier Business Partner with headquarters in Boca Raton, Florida, for a technology solution. “One of the great benefits I found in working with people at Champion on this project was their engineers who were each a specialist in their own area, one was a SAN specialist, one was a BladeCenter® specialist, people who really had all the answers we needed,” Olle said.

#### **Problem Solved**

Champion recommended the IBM eServer BladeCenter HS20 servers with mirror drives, dual processors, and redundancy with power in the enclosure, integrating everything into Polaris’ IBM FASTT SAN. This IT Simplification solution addressed the challenge of the physical space available to the IT department, as well as giving them significant growth capacity.

“With our new system,” Olle said, “we have a significantly smaller footprint, much more powerful machines, and

we can better monitor what’s going on in our network. In the space of one of our 5500 servers, we now have 14 Blades that can run circles around the old server. We are thrilled with it.”

Physical space is only one of the benefits Polaris is reaping from their new BladeCenter installation. Existing applications moved onto the BladeCenter have increased performance levels.

“For instance,” Olle explained, “on our application that tracks student attendance and grades, we’ve had some issues in the past because our servers were overburdened. Now, that is not the case. My people can get in, take care of their business and get out quickly, and get on with the important part of their work, which is teaching their classes.”

The increased capacity also allows the Polaris IT team a technology “playground,” as Olle calls it. Where server space for simply testing and experimenting with new processes was an unavailable luxury before, the IT team now has a dedicated testing ground. “By testing before rolling out a program, we’ve improved the uptime on our network which greatly improves our service to our users,” he said.

The project implementation included an extensive diagnostic examination of the Polaris IT environment, which identified the need for firmware updates and patches, all which contributed to increasing the system’s capabilities and reducing its complexity.

#### **Budget Always an Issue**

While budget is always an issue on any

solution, in a not-for-profit education environment it is perhaps even more critical. The school needed to be flexible and responsive to its varied audiences, and making the IT dollar stretch far and work hard is paramount. The solution designed by Champion kept that issue at the forefront, providing a cost-effective design that was also reliable and scalable for the growth expected in the coming years. “Because they got to know our organization, Champion knew we needed to get real value from our IT dollar,” Olle said. “Their solution gave us quality equipment and quality service for pricing that I considered reasonable.

“Champion had a level of understanding of our business. You know, you can get good pricing anywhere, but it’s the service where a deal is made or broken. I’ve turned to them several times since we completed that first project.”

With the IBM BladeCenters solving the overcrowding problem and the new server solution delivering faster speeds, greater performance and substantially better reliability, Polaris Career Center’s IT staff gives the whole project an A+.

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