

Ideal Integrations Partners with Nimble Storage

Leading service provider chooses Nimble Storage to cut storage costs and provide better service to its growing customer base

Ideal Integrations, Inc. is an IT systems integration company specializing in the design, implementation, maintenance, and management of infrastructure—ranging in scope from single projects to complete services and solutions. The integrator’s clients range from small start-ups to companies generating over \$2 billion in annual revenue, spanning numerous industries and locations across the United States. Ideal Integrations was founded in 2003 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and now employs 43 highly skilled IT and management professionals.

Christopher Fox is the Director of Technology at Ideal Integrations. He manages all infrastructure for the company’s cloud/laaS environment. He is also responsible for research and development of the company’s new cloud service offerings from both a technical and business perspective. “Our focus is to provide customers with a sustainable competitive advantage through the strategic use of technology,” noted Fox. “We combine cutting-edge innovations with a creative and skilled team of engineers to deliver customized technology solutions that will enable our customers to succeed.”

Business Requirements and Challenges

Demand for the successful integrator’s cloud/laaS service was growing rapidly. But it was far too difficult from both a management and cost perspective to add capacity fast enough to meet demand using the company’s traditional SAN environment. Fox and his team also wanted to find a way to curb escalating storage costs, in order to keep service fees low for its loyal customer base.

“We lacked the ability to handle large amounts of IO without relying on spindle count solely to provide performance on our SANs,” explained Fox. “Finding a storage platform that would enable easy and cost-effective scalability, both in terms of IO and disk space, was a huge challenge for us.”

Looking for a New Storage Solution

The Ideal Integrations team began looking for a new storage solution that could solve the firm’s scalability and cost challenges. “We started by looking at the traditional ‘big players’ in the storage market. We also evaluated a few all-flash arrays, some hybrid arrays, and even considered adding a flash ‘tier’ to our current storage systems. Not one of the options was priced at a comfortable starting point or a good fit for our mixed customer, non-workload-specific deployments.”

After being shown the value proposition of the Nimble arrays and undergoing a successful POC to ‘really kick the tires,’ it was an easy decision to choose the Nimble arrays, according to Fox. “We are approached by multiple vendors every year, asking us to evaluate a wide range of products and software. The Nimble product and engineering team absolutely stood out from the rest. The concept of hybrid storage intrigued us from a technology stand-point and promised to solve all of our storage challenges.”

Ideal Integrations understands the importance of staying in front of technology trends and maintaining a high standard of innovative excellence. To achieve those goals, they only

Customer Case Study Ideal Integrations



Customer Challenges

- Unable to scale storage capacity and IO separately
- Wanted to reduce the high costs of storage

Solution

- Nimble Storage CS460 arrays

Business Benefits

- Obtained high performing storage at a much lower cost
- Gained the ability to scale IO and disk independently
- Doubled customer snapshot retention periods without increasing customer fees

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Christopher Fox
Director of Technology
Ideal Integrations

align their company with partners that share their vision for high quality solutions and services. “That’s one of the reasons we made the decision to partner with Nimble Storage. We wanted to not only find a product that fit our technical needs—but also a company that we could have a great partner relationship with, as opposed to just ‘churning and burning’ our orders through one of the larger, traditional storage vendors.”

“At Ideal Integrations, we are not only a cloud provider, but a reseller of on-premise solutions,” noted Fox. “We only use the best software and hardware for our customer environments. We have now added Nimble to the top of our list for the storage component of all our solutions going forward.”

Moving to Nimble Storage

Ideal Integrations made the decision to purchase two Nimble Storage CS460 arrays in 2013, one for the company’s production datacenter in Pittsburgh, and the other for its disaster recovery facility in Chicago. Installing the Nimble arrays went quickly, Fox reported. “The Nimble hardware install took just 2-3 hours. We only had to call the engineers on the Nimble support line for a few tips on how to configure the arrays to achieve the best performance for our unique requirements. They were very helpful and made the perfect recommendations to maximize the performance of our Nimble environment.”

Ideal Integrations supports a very wide range of applications and VMs for its clients. “Our customers range in size from 2-3 VMs to well over 150 VMs,” Fox reported. “Whether it’s snapshot-based storage, replicated storage, or ‘just plain storage’ for backups and archiving—we are now able to meet all of our customers’ requirements on the Nimble arrays.”

Exceeding All Expectations

“I must admit, we were a bit skeptical at first to see how our ‘real-world mix’ of workloads would do with the Nimble technology,” Fox explained. “It is much easier to project performance if you have just one primary workload, such as SQL or Exchange. As a result, we set our expectations cautiously so we would be pleasantly surprised rather than disappointed. The Nimble arrays have been able to meet or exceed our expectations in all measurements! As a result, we have accelerated our plans to migrate more client workloads to the Nimble arrays.”

Providing Better Services

Since deploying the Nimble arrays, Fox and his team are now able to focus on serving customers quickly and providing value-added services, rather than constantly managing storage capacity and IO, or worrying about performance spikes and latency. “In the past, it was a shell game to determine which SAN had the needed IO and which SAN had the right capacity. Then we had to figure out how to bill each customer for that level of service, how to evaluate each client’s needs before the workload went on the SAN, and then how we could adjust their level of service after the fact. Now we just put everyone on the Nimble arrays and the problems are solved. It is a more efficient service model.”

Based on Nimble’s high compression ratios and efficiency on snapshots, Ideal Integrations is now able to deliver much longer retention periods for customer snapshots. “With the Nimble arrays, we can give our clients twice as long to retain their snapshots at little-to-no extra charge. In addition to making life better for us, our customers are seeing tremendous value from being on the Nimble arrays as well.”

Before Nimble, Fox and his team were struggling with the high cost per IO and per gig of storage. “We are getting much more value out of the Nimble arrays than we did with our

previous storage environment,” Fox stated. “The Nimble arrays are enabling us to save money and our customers can achieve optimal performance at lower costs. It’s a win-win scenario.”

Impressed with Nimble Support

Fox also stated that he was impressed with the quality of Nimble Support. “While we have not had to engage Nimble support very often, we definitely appreciate speaking to an engineer-level person on our first call. We no longer have to experience the typical and frustrating ‘tier A-Z’ model used by the other storage vendors. That approach always slows down and complicates the support process. With Nimble, we can tell right away we are getting support from an individual that knows the product inside and out, not someone reading off of a script.”

Closing Thoughts

The results obtained with the Nimble arrays have been so good that Fox and his team have just placed an order for another Nimble array for customer demos and internal testing. They also plan to purchase a fourth Nimble array for the company’s Pittsburgh datacenter to host DR for the integrator’s growing customer base.

“Nimble Storage is delivering all of the performance, space savings, and value from an expansion and growth perspective that we were promised when we first did the trials,” Fox concluded. “Every once in a while in IT, you find a product that promises everything you have been looking for to address a certain challenge. Even more unusual is finding a product that actually delivers on that promise—which is exactly what Nimble does.”



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