

Tintri Storage Helps Tiller Corporation Move into the Fast Lane



VM-Aware Platform Paves the Way to Higher Performance and Management Simplicity for all Virtual Servers and Desktops

www.tillercorp.com

Industry

- Construction

Geography

- Maple Grove, Minnesota

Virtualization environment

- VMware vSphere
- Citrix XenDesktop
- Traditional storage: Dell Compellent

VM profile

- Test/Dev server environment for .Net application development
- SQL Server, Exchange
- Citrix XenApp (uses a StoreFront interface for mobile delivery)
- Citrix XenDesktop
- MS Office
- SharePoint
- Libra System POS System with Enterprise Information Server
- WSUS Patch Management Server

Key challenges

- Running out of capacity, existing storage environment due for refresh

Tintri solution

- Two Tintri VMstore™ T620 systems

Primary use case

- Tintri is being used for all virtual server and desktop storage

Business benefits

- Obtained higher performance for VMware vSphere and Horizon desktops
- Cut reporting time from 20 minutes to three minutes
- Simplified storage management
- Gained comprehensive visibility into all storage and servers from one dashboard
- Obtained excellent support

Company Information

Tiller Corporation provides high quality aggregates and hot mix asphalt to construction companies located throughout the Twin Cities, Minnesota metropolitan market. Founded in 1946, Tiller now manages operations that span approximately 4,500 acres of land, including over 15 aggregate operations and 10 asphalt plants. Tiller has earned its excellent reputation as a great place to work, with numerous local, state, and national environmental and safety awards for exceeding industry standards in safety.

IT Challenges

Tiller Corporation had been relying on a Dell Compellent SAN since 2009. “Dell was our first entry into the virtual infrastructure world,” explained Gene Schaff, Director of IT at Tiller Corporation. “We initially put in a 4TB Fibre Channel SAN and decided to try the Citrix XenServer hypervisor. That turned out to be a very challenging implementation. We had a lot of incompatibility issues between our SAN and the Citrix hypervisor, which caused us many headaches and untold man hours.”

Four years later, Tiller switched from XenServer to VMware’s vSphere hypervisor. “We really appreciated the high-availability and failover features of the VMware solution,” noted Schaff. “We virtualized all of our servers, except for one physical domain controller. With VMware, we were able to centralize management and obtain all of the high-availability benefits that the virtual world brings.”

Tiller Corporation’s storage environment was due for a refresh. “As we added more servers to our Compellent SAN, we were noticing performance issues with disk access,” Schaff reported. “And since we had reached 95% capacity, we knew we needed to add more disk space. But we didn’t want to put any more money into the Dell Compellent platform, because the systems had reached end-of-life. So we went to our senior management and got the go-ahead to upgrade our storage environment.”

"Tintri provided the best combination of price and performance for our virtual environment. It allows us to use standard disk storage in addition to flash, in a perfect combination. The performance was amazing, but the management piece was what really set Tintri apart from all other storage vendors."

Gene Schaff, Director of IT, Tiller Corporation

Searching for a New Storage Solution

Schaff and his team started looking for a new storage solution that would provide higher performance for the virtual environment. "We learned a lot about the demands of virtualization over the last four years," he noted. "So we made a list of all the functionality that we needed for our new SAN. Our top criteria included higher performance and easier management."

Schaff also wanted a solution that would enable Tiller to expand its Citrix XenDesktop virtual desktop environment. "We are just starting to get into VDI," Schaff reported. "We currently have about 20 desktops, and should reach 40-60 desktops by the end of this year. We wanted a SAN that could not only handle our storage needs from the server side, we also wanted a solution that would be ideal for virtual desktops."

Schaff and his team originally considered solutions from EMC, NetApp, Tegile, HP, and Oracle. "We also looked at Pure Storage, which is a total flash memory solution," said Schaff. "As nice as flash is, it's also very expensive. We also looked at Simplivity, which was a hyper-converged technology. But it wasn't a good fit, since we weren't trying to solve our server needs--we just needed storage. I then attended a VMware User Group (VMUG) conference here in the Twin Cities and everyone was talking about Tintri. So I decided to learn more about what Tintri was all about."

Choosing Tintri

Schaff was impressed with the demo of Tintri's web interface and Global Center. "That was a real eye-opener for us," he said. "We could see all of our virtual servers at the VM level—not just at the storage level. We could monitor the processors, memory, performance, network congestion, and much more. To be able to see all of that in one intuitive dashboard was something we couldn't get from any other storage vendor."

After seeing the demo, Tiller Corporation made the decision to purchase two Tintri T620 systems. "Tintri provided the best combination of price and performance for our virtual environment," Schaff reported. "It allows us to use standard disk storage in addition to flash, in a perfect combination. The performance was amazing, but the management piece was what really set Tintri apart from all other storage vendors."

Obtaining Higher Performance

"Tintri's performance has been outstanding," according to Schaff. "We were very happy to see that the flash memory is working the way we expected. We really noticed the difference when we did a live conversion from our Compellent SAN to the Tintri solution. We did it during the day, and no one knew it except us. The only person that made a comment was our Controller after he ran a report. He asked us what we had done with our network environment, since the report that normally took 20 minutes to finish took just three minutes to run on Tintri."

Implementing Disaster Recovery

Tiller Corporation's IT team was getting ready to launch a new disaster recovery site earlier this year. "With everything being virtual now, we had the option of replicating our data to a co-lo site, the cloud, or on-premise. We decided to go on-premise, because it was a lower cost option for us. We have an office about 50 miles from here that we could use as our DR site." Tiller then purchased the second Tintri T620 system for the new site. "We needed a solution that would simplify DR," Schaff explained.

Working with Datalink

Tiller Corporation purchased the two T620 systems through Datalink, a data center solutions and services provider for Fortune 500 and mid-tier enterprises. "Datalink is not only a service provider and reseller, they are also a Tintri customer," noted Schaff. "What impressed us was that they chose Tintri for their own internal VDI solution. They are a huge, national company with many different storage vendors in their data center. So I called them to ask what led them down that road to make the same decision we did. They said it was the ease of management with Tintri Global Center--the ability to see all VMs and the layers of management in one piece of software. They evaluated the pros and cons of every single vendor before they decided. Tintri had features that the competition either didn't have or couldn't provide at the same cost point."

Expanding the VDI Deployment

Dave Tesch is a network administrator at Tiller Corporation. "We are now rolling out our VDI solution with a Wyse terminal on each desk replacing our older notebooks," Tesch reported. "Every person that is using the VDI solution on Tintri has noticed a huge difference in performance. It's because of the flash memory and how Tintri handles it. Everything goes into flash before disk. That is a huge plus for VDI. So even our non-IT users are noticing a big difference in performance."

Receiving Excellent Support

The Tiller Corp IT team has been very impressed with Tintri Support. "I've never needed to call Tintri Tech support since they do such a great job of watching our systems," noted John MacDonald, network Infrastructure administrator at Tiller. "Tintri Support gets notified automatically of any issues or alerts that pop up. They'll generate a ticket for us, and we just trade emails with them."

Tintri recently generated a firmware update based on Tiller's recommendation. "There was an issue with replication--it wasn't serious," noted MacDonald. "The Tintri system wasn't automatically deleting some of the older snapshots. So we talked to Tintri Support about the issue. Two weeks later, we received an email that they had completed the firmware update. Tintri must really care about its customers if they are willing to listen and fix things that quickly and come out with a patch. It showed that even small problems had a high priority. We downloaded the firmware update and everything runs perfectly now. Even the physical hardware works great. We had to pull one of the controllers out for an issue, and we just took it out and everything kept going. The failover is really slick. It works well and is very easy to work with."

Serving as Tintri Advocates

"I had a great experience at VMworld last year," Schaff related. "We are a small 250 employee company, and we were seated at the same table with Ed Lee, Tintri's lead architect. He's the one that created RAID. He was very interested in listening to our story and wanted to know all about our needs and challenges. I give Tintri very high marks for its willingness to bring executives of that caliber out to user events. We really enjoyed talking with him, and it was the start of a really great relationship with Tintri. We are now advocates for Tintri because it's such a good product. With its high performance, ease of management, and VMware-aware processes—it has become the focal point of our data center. No other vendor can bring that combination to the table."



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