



The Cook & Boardman Group Builds Solid IT Foundation on Tintri and Cisco UCS

Combined Solution is Cost-Effective, Easy to Deploy, Simple to Manage, and Enables Replication



The Cook & Boardman Group, LLC

The Cook & Boardman Group, LLC (TCBG) is a privately owned engineering services and specialty distributor-subcontractor. TCBG is the premier provider of architectural hardware, doors, doorframes, and related building specialties for non-residential building applications. Established in 1955, The Cook & Boardman Group has built a reputation through full service sales units, as the “go to” supplier for point-of-entry products and services. Today, TCBG works with customers across the United States and internationally.

IT Challenges

Rafael Cohen is the director of IT services at The Cook & Boardman Group. He is responsible for all IT infrastructure at the company’s headquarters in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and nearly two dozen locations across the United States.

Cohen and his IT team were trying to address three serious issues with the company’s existing storage platform. “The first challenge was that we lacked the ability to easily scale our existing storage environment,” noted Cohen. “We also didn’t have a dedicated employee on-deck with the necessary skillset to manage a traditional SAN. And finally, we wanted the ability to replicate our applications and data between our two datacenters.”

Launching a New, Private Cloud

The TCBG IT team was getting ready to launch its first private cloud in June of 2014. “This is actually the third private cloud I’ve rolled out,” noted Cohen. “The first iteration was at a different company, where I used an iSCSI SAN with traditional servers. For the second rollout, I was able to use Cisco UCS along with a fiber Channel SAN. It was a big improvement over the first private cloud, since we were able to use some newer SAN technology that allowed for pools and tiering.”

Cohen considered using redundant arrays of inexpensive nodes for the new TCBG cloud, much like what Google does with its servers. “We decided to stay with the traditional model instead, using SAN storage and Cisco UCS,” said Cohen. “My quest was to find an all-inclusive device or solution where I could get networking, processing, and storage together in one system. I thought I had found that with a different vendor, but when we started looking into the feature set, we realized it was inadequate. It was impossible to manage at the VM level through the storage platform being offered. Also, in order to scale storage, we would have had to purchase more processor, network, and memory and I didn’t want to do that. My goal was to commoditize the data center in four main areas: processor, network, storage, and memory. Tintri helped me do that.”

Industry

- Building and Construction Supplies

Geography

- Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Website

- www.cookandboardman.com

Key challenges

- Launching a new private cloud
- Wanted to simplify storage management
- Lacked the ability to replicate data

Tintri solution

- Tintri VMstore™ T540
- Cisco UCS Servers

Business benefits

- Eliminated the need to hire a dedicated storage administrator
- Implemented replication between datacenters
- Achieved a storage environment with a richer feature set, at a lower cost

Evaluating Tintri

After reading several industry blogs on storage, Cohen made the decision to conduct his own 'technical deep dive' on the Tintri products. "In my opinion, storage is just storage," Cohen explained. "It doesn't matter what hardware you buy. I don't care what server my SAN runs on – it's the software I am purchasing. That's where the magic happens. After learning about the feature set that comes with Tintri, I knew it was the right solution for us. We quickly made the decision to purchase a Tintri T540 with replication. It was a very easy choice for us."

Why Cisco UCS?

When asked why The Cook & Boardman Group chose Cisco UCS servers, Cohen replied, "Anyone who has ever rolled out virtualization without using Cisco knows the trials and tribulations involved associated with that approach. UCS makes everything so much easier. You don't have to deal with all of the cabling issues and deploying individual rack mount servers. The overall ease of use of the Cisco UCS platform and the ability to quickly roll it out made it the only choice for us."

Achieving a Fast and Simple SAN Rollout

Cohen had originally asked Tintri Support for help with the installation. "We called the Tintri support rep and asked him to help us configure our environment," Cohen recalled. "He showed up on time and ready to go, but we had to delay the install since we ran into difficulties not associated with the Tintri. So we sent him home until we could fix the issue. The next day we rolled out the SAN on our own without any help. It was very simple. We physically connected the Tintri device, fired it up, and followed just a few installation steps. I didn't have to configure a single LUN or volume, or worry about which volumes the servers ran on. It was by far the easiest SAN I ever rolled out."

The Winning Combination: Tintri Storage, Cisco UCS, and VMware

The Cook & Boardman Group is now running all of its Microsoft applications on the Cisco UCS servers and Tintri storage. "We have a fairly small IT shop, with just 35 to 50 physical servers running MS Active Directory, SQL, Exchange Server, and a few file servers," Cohen reported. "We will be virtualizing 100% of our environment with VMware on Tintri and Cisco UCS servers, and also plan to implement VDI."

Before Tintri, TCBG lacked the ability to replicate between datacenters. Cohen and his team are now rolling out two new datacenters, one on the East Coast and one on the West Coast. TCBG purchased a second T540 to serve as the replication target in the mirror datacenter, and will be using Tintri Replication for seamless migration of the data.

Obtaining a Better Solution at a Lower Cost

"When comparing feature sets per dollar, the total costs are much lower on Tintri," explained Cohen. "Tintri is far less expensive than the other SANs because it was purpose-built for virtualization. Not only is it a much better solution with a richer feature set, the long term costs are much lower as well."

The management simplicity of the Tintri array eliminated the need to hire or outsource storage administration to manage a traditional SAN. "The biggest benefit for us is Tintri's ease of use and scalability, and the ability to run all of our applications on one Tintri device," concluded Cohen. "With Tintri, we don't have to manage pools of drives, RAIDs, LUNs, or volumes anymore. The skills gap on our old storage was a huge challenge for us. Now it's gone. Tintri builds on all of the benefits of using Cisco UCS Servers and VMware for virtualization, and takes it one step further. With Tintri, I don't have to manage the storage anymore."

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