



Real Estate Website Enhances Client Experience with Upgraded SAN Platform

Insight helps WhereToLive.com increase storage capacity while improving availability and response time.

The Challenge

Independent real estate agents nationwide rely on WhereToLive.com to provide the web-based productivity tools that are critical to their success. From managed Web sites to wireless e-mail device support, WhereToLive.com's service enables lead generation, listing distribution, prospect and contact management, online marketing and more.

It didn't take long for the market to respond to the service after its launch in 1999, and data volume became a growing concern for the company. Rapid expansion led to a storage platform burdened with millions of property listings, supporting e-mails and database files—each of which was essential to clients who were assured five 9s of availability.

The task of upgrading SAN capacity fell on Benjamin Higginbotham, WhereToLive.com's Director of New Technology. In addition to maintaining high availability, the new platform would have to deliver faster application response for developers and clients as well as the flexibility to grow incrementally with business demands.

"You can't go down ever, and you can't lose an e-mail. It's not acceptable," Higginbotham explained. "You can't have downtime and you can't drop millions of 1K files on tape. Your tape would be spinning constantly – 24/7, 365 – and only capturing a fraction of the data. So we needed a solution that would allow us to back up the data quickly and effectively."

The Solution

Although Higginbotham had a preferred solution in mind, he engaged his Insight sales representative to present alternative options. Insight assessed WhereToLive.com's unique business requirements and identified solutions from 10 different manufacturers before recommending Compellent's Storage Center SAN platform.

Compellent was headquartered just up the road from WhereToLive.com in suburban Minneapolis, but Higginbotham wasn't familiar with their product. Insight arranged for him to test the technology and the platform fulfilled his requirements by providing scalability, high availability and easy tracking of vast quantities of tiny files.

AT A GLANCE

Client Profile

WhereToLive.com provides Web-based tools such as managed Web sites and wireless e-mail device support to independent real estate agents nationwide.

Challenge

Rapid growth led to a storage platform burdened with millions of property listings, supporting e-mails and database files. WhereToLive.com needed to upgrade SAN capacity to assure high availability to its clients.

Solution

Insight's personnel designed and deployed a storage solution based on Compellent's Storage Center SAN platform. It provided scalability, high availability and easy tracking of clients' files.

Result

Insight's solution offered high availability, scalability and lower energy costs – not to mention the ability to provision new servers in minutes rather than hours.



With a broad client base stretching across North America, Insight was able to point to other Storage Center implementations of similar scope. This provided Higginbotham with the proof of performance he needed to move forward with the project.

“The funny thing is we are about a mile and a half from Compellent,” Higginbotham recalled. “Insight looked at our requirements and said we should look at Compellent and I had never heard of them.”

Insight handled all aspects of the implementation—from the pre-delivery site survey through the hands-on racking and stacking of hardware to an introductory training session with WhereToLive.com’s administrators. During the implementation, engineers discovered an issue with the SAN’s failover redundancy that impacted availability. A quick investigation revealed that legacy network adapter cards were at fault and the engineers worked the problem until it was resolved.

“They ran into a little bit of a technical snafu and they just sat here and diligently worked on it until it was fixed,” Higginbotham said. “They didn’t give me any baloney or try to sugarcoat the issue. They checked in every single day and told us exactly what was going on. It was a great installation. I was very impressed with the whole process.”

The Results

Since deploying its new SAN platform, WhereToLive.com has achieved the high availability and scalability it required while also reducing its energy costs. And the solution is so user-friendly that the time commitment required to provision new servers has dropped from over four hours to just a few minutes.

Higginbotham now plans to deploy a second Storage Center SAN outside of his headquarters for disaster recovery purposes. He credits Insight with introducing him to a world-class SAN manufacturer—right in his own backyard.

“Insight was great because they really knew what we needed,” Higginbotham said. “Using the resources of the VAR was tremendous because I wasn’t just relying on my knowledge. I have the knowledge of a whole team of people working for me. It was a great experience.”

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*– Benjamin Higginbotham,
Director of New Technology,
WhereToLive.com*

Who is Insight?

Insight is a technology solutions provider serving global and local clients in 170 countries on all continents. Today, thousands of clients, including more than 80 percent of the Global Fortune 500, rely on Insight to acquire, implement and manage technology solutions to empower their business.

Insight provides software and licensing services globally. In addition, we offer a comprehensive portfolio which also includes hardware and value added services for our clients in North America and the U.K. We are aggressively expanding our global capabilities by introducing new offerings, including hardware and services, to meet emerging needs for our clients worldwide.

Insight is ranked No. 477 in the Fortune 500.

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The logo for Insight, featuring the word "Insight" in a serif font with a red triangle above the letter "i".