

niu Solutions takes cloud services to new heights with IBM

Delivers high service levels and reliability to customers while maximizing profitability

Overview

The need

As niu's mid-market customer base expanded, the managed service provider sought to maintain high service levels without increasing operational expenses or staffing levels.

The solution

As capacity needs in its cloud hosting environment grew, niu scaled out its existing IBM® XIV® Storage System infrastructure tenfold, delivering reliable and efficient storage for some 700 TB of customer data.

The benefit

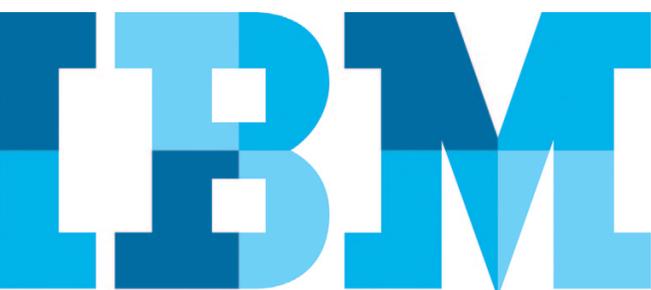
IBM XIV Gen3 upped performance by a factor of four; requires less than half of one FTE to manage 700 TB of storage; allows niu to offer tier one hosted storage at a very competitive price.

“The IBM XIV architecture is absolutely brilliant for the service-provider market: it delivers enterprise-class storage at an excellent price point, helping us to design more commercially attractive offerings for our clients,” states Phil Clark, Channel Director at niu Solutions. “Simply put, XIV generates more revenue for this business than any other technology that we have.”

IBM XIV provides niu with top levels of performance and easy scalability at a low TCO, helping the company to boost profitability and competitiveness by offering high-quality hosted storage at a commercially attractive price point for mid-market customers.

niu boasts more than a decade of experience in providing managed IT services to mid-market clients across multiple sectors in the UK. Based in London, England, the company employs around 120 people and operates data centers in the UK and US.

Delivering high-quality services to customers at a competitive price point is critical to maintaining niu's commercial success. Stephen Bedford, Technical Director at niu Solutions, explains: “We compete in a space where companies are always looking to cut expenses, and where more low-cost providers are emerging. We must keep a tight rein on costs so we can remain profitable, and still offer services at an attractive price point to clients. And we need to do so while also delivering strong performance and around-the-clock availability.”



“As a service provider, IBM XIV gives us a significant competitive advantage. The architecture is designed to support shared multi-tenancy environments and virtualized environments, which means that we can run the business more flexibly and cost-effectively.”

—Phil Clark, Channel Director, niu Solutions

Scaling up for next-level storage

A long-term user of IBM technology, niu has for over five years relied on the IBM XIV Storage System to support its customers. As niu extended its offerings to include hosted cloud services, the company made the strategic decision to build on its investment in IBM XIV technology, and place the system at the heart of its storage landscape.

“We started out with two IBM XIV systems to offer shared storage solutions to clients,” says Clark. “A number of our clients were so impressed by what XIV could do that they asked for their own dedicated equipment. To keep up with the demand, we expanded our storage infrastructure significantly and now operate ten XIV systems on either a shared basis—running a multi-tenancy environment for cloud customers—or on a dedicated basis for clients who want high-quality storage for specific applications.”

Currently, niu manages around 700 TB of data on XIV—a tenfold increase since 2008. The solution supports hundreds of virtual servers, which run on numerous physical machines. XIV is used as the storage platform for a wide range of customer applications, including Oracle, SQL and DB2® databases, WebSphere® deployments, ERP, CRM and business intelligence systems.

Soaring high with cloud-agile XIV architecture

IBM XIV provides niu with a flexible platform that is a perfect fit for cloud delivery models—from the system’s virtualized design and massive parallelism, to automated management and ultra-simple provisioning.

“XIV is ideal for enabling cloud services,” says Clark. “We use all of the tools within the XIV to support cloud strategies, from virtualization and automation to thin provisioning. The XIV is designed to be very elastic, so we can add capacity quickly and scale up easily. This allows us to give clients truly on-demand access to the services they need.”

XIV Gen3 has delivered a fourfold increase in performance at niu. The company has seen performance improve as capacity increases, since the solution’s modular design means that adding capacity to the XIV environment also provides carefully matched amounts of processing power, cache, host interfaces, and bandwidth.

IBM solution components

Hardware

- IBM® XIV® Storage System
- IBM System Storage® DS8100

Software

- IBM DB2®
 - IBM Tivoli® Storage Manager
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IT Environment

Operating systems

- Microsoft Windows Server 2003, 2008 and 2012
- Red Hat Enterprise Linux 3 and 4

Databases

- Microsoft SQL Server 2005, 2008 and 2012
- Oracle
- MySQL

Applications

- SAP
- Microsoft Exchange Server 2013
- Sage

Virtualization

- VMware vSphere 4.0 and 5.0
 - VMware vCloud Director
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Clark remarks: “For shared services, where we have multiple clients running tens of terabytes of storage, as we add more clients the whole client base gets the benefit of high performance. It’s very clever how the XIV architecture supports a shared service, or a managed service provider, in this way.”

Driving down costs with built-efficiencies

XIV is helping niu to rationalize storage management and cut costs, thanks to its outstanding ease of use and scalability. “It takes the equivalent of less than half a person to manage our entire stack of XIV storage, which is exceptional,” comments Bedford. “We also have a key metric that measures pounds of revenue to rack footprint, and XIV is number one without a doubt. Out of all of the systems that we run, XIV generates the most pounds per square inch per kVA power.”

Clark adds: “With XIV we are able to add capacity incredibly quickly. If a client needs more storage within a short timeframe, we’re able to switch that on almost instantly, because XIV manages capacity very cleverly. So our clients can be a lot more agile and responsive as a result of our ability to manage storage flexibly.”

Partnering with IBM for a competitive edge

By providing enterprise-class storage at a low TCO, IBM XIV helps niu keep ahead of its competitors. The cost savings delivered by XIV allow the company to offer high-quality hosted storage at a price point that is accessible to more clients, and to deliver services that many clients couldn’t afford to buy themselves.

Clark concludes: “As a service provider, IBM XIV gives us a significant competitive advantage. The architecture is designed to support shared multi-tenancy and virtualized environments, allowing us to run the business more flexibly and cost-effectively. XIV is really a future-proof technology, which will help us to stay on top of an evolving market and continue to deliver the most benefit to our clients.”

For more information

Contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit us at: ibm.com/xiv

For more information on niu Solutions, visit: niu-solutions.com

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