



Manufacturer Reduces Tech Worries, Boosts Productivity by Upgrading Software

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Manufacturing

Customer Profile

Firetrace International makes fire suppression systems that are used in small or enclosed spaces. The Scottsdale, Arizona-based firm has 45 employees and numerous customers worldwide.

Business Situation

Firetrace has grown rapidly, with rising numbers of customers, employees, computers—and computer-related chores. Managers wanted to empower employees with new IT services without increasing IT work.

Solution

Firetrace upgraded to Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard to expand email capabilities, simplify server management, improve remote access to files, and enhance mobile-device security.

Benefits

- Two more hours a week to expand the business
- Greater peace of mind
- Enhanced mobile device security
- Faster response to customers

“Windows Small Business Server 2011 has given me back about two hours a week that I can use to do more important things than manage servers.”

Scott Starr, Marketing Director, Firetrace International

Firetrace International makes automatic fire suppression systems that are used in “micro” environments such as machines, electrical control panels, engine enclosures, and aircraft. The company has grown amazingly fast, winning customers all over the world, and rapid growth outstripped the firm’s aging IT technology. Firetrace upgraded to Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard, which provides enhanced email services, automatic backup, easy remote access, and other capabilities. Since the upgrade, the Firetrace marketing director is able to divert about two hours a week from technology concerns to expanding the business. He and a part-time IT staffer can support more employees without adding staff, and they worry far less about email availability and mobile device security. With an improved ability to access email and files remotely, employees can respond to customers faster.



Windows® Small Business Server 2011
Standard

“Windows Small Business Server opened up a world of possibilities in terms of technology use.”

Scott Starr, Marketing Director, Firetrace International

Situation

Many businesses speak colloquially about “putting out fires,” or resolving emergencies, but Firetrace International literally does so. Firetrace manufactures automatic fire detection and suppression systems that are used in “micro” environments to protect people and assets. These environments include machines, farming equipment, aircraft, and buses. The United States Military uses Firetrace systems in military vehicles and several models of fixed-wing aircraft. Based in Scottsdale, Arizona, Firetrace is growing rapidly and has 45 employees.

Another company developed the proprietary Firetrace technology in the 1980s but never sold it outside of the United Kingdom. Firetrace acquired the rights to the technology in 2000 and began marketing it aggressively worldwide. Since then, the company has grown by leaps and bounds. “We had 5 people in 2004 and today we have 45. Accommodating rapid growth is one of our key concerns,” says Scott Starr, Marketing Director at Firetrace International.

As it added employees, Firetrace added computers and computer management work. Firetrace started with just five PCs in 2004 but subsequently added several servers—one for file-sharing and others to run Microsoft Dynamics GP, a computer-aided design application, and Remote Desktop Services (formerly called Windows Terminal Services, a feature of the Windows Server operating system that, among other things, enables users to access applications and files remotely).

Tim Hoffland, Network Administrator at Firetrace, cared for these servers and the company’s 45 desktop and portable computers but only worked part-time. As the computers and workload increased,

Starr pitched in to help and slowly got pulled into server issues, which distracted him from his main focus of expanding the business.

In 2007, Firetrace met with itSynergy, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner based in Phoenix, Arizona, which introduced it to Windows Small Business Server 2003. This was an integrated software solution that included email, collaboration, backup, remote access, and mobile device support, all running on a single server. “Windows Small Business Server opened up a world of possibilities in terms of technology use,” Starr says. “Our employees could more easily access files from outside the office, benefit from a modern email program, and store files on a central server with automatic backups.”

However, Firetrace continued to grow and ultimately outgrew its Windows Small Business Server 2003 software. Specifically, that software limited email database size at 75 gigabytes (GB) for an entire organization. Over the course of a couple of years before hitting that limit, Starr and Hoffland were constantly requesting employees to delete email messages and asking itSynergy to increase its email database capacity. “Each time we adjusted the email program, there was an interruption in email service,” says Starr. “Ultimately, we were losing our email server every other weekend, to the tune of six to ten hours of email stoppage, not to mention the stress and time involved in restoring service. We just couldn’t tolerate the downtime.”

Although using Windows Small Business Server to access files and email remotely was better than having no remote access at all, employees had to establish virtual private network (VPN) connections, which were often difficult to sustain. Also,

"It's much easier for me as a nontechnical person to understand what the server is doing without involving itSynergy or chasing down Tim."

Scott Starr, Marketing Director, Firetrace International

employees increasingly used smartphones, with the result that management worried about the company data residing on those phones. Windows Small Business Server 2003 did provide remote deletion of device contents, but activating the capability required additional tools.

Solution

When Microsoft announced Windows Small Business Server 2011, Firetrace was immediately interested. "Windows Small Business Server 2011 solved all the problems we were having and was a natural next step for us," says Starr. "Also, it was time to upgrade the underlying hardware, so it made sense to refresh the software, too."

Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard provides the latest Microsoft operating system, email server, and collaboration software. It also provides improved remote access capabilities; enhanced mobile device security, and software for file and printer sharing and data backup and restoration. Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 would lift the email database size limitations and reliability problems that Firetrace faced.

Improvements in remote access and mobile device security would help employees be more productive when out of the office.

In one weekend, itSynergy installed a new Dell PowerEdge T410 server and Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard on it, and migrated all files from Windows Small Business Server 2003 to the new server.

"itSynergy did a beyond-fantastic job, both in prepping for deployment and executing the deployment," Starr says. "Our work was completely unaffected, and that's the highest compliment I can pay."

Firetrace exclusively uses Dell hardware and was happy to add a late-model Dell server

to its server family. "There's a reason why we're a Dell shop, and it's because the reliability of our Dell computers has been excellent," Starr says. "When an issue does crop up, Dell is right there to address it. Our Windows Small Business Server system has not had a single issue, and it's been running for five months [since October 2010]."

Today, Firetrace employees use the Remote Web Access feature in Windows Small Business Server 2011 to access email messages and files from any web connection, without the need to establish a VPN connection. They can even access their entire PC desktop which helps them be more productive from just about anywhere.

Also, with improvements made to the Windows Small Business Server 2011 management console, Hoffland and Starr can more easily take care of server. "It's much easier for me as a nontechnical person to understand what the server is doing without involving itSynergy or chasing down Tim," says Starr. "I can do routine tasks such as creating or deleting a new user account or password on my own."

Firetrace also enjoys the improvements in mobile device security that Windows Small Business Server 2011 delivers. The software requires that any device trying to connect to the network meet certain security policies; but for mobile phones, Windows Small Business Server requires by default that users enter a password before using their phones.

Firetrace has yet to use Microsoft SharePoint Foundation 2010, software in Windows Small Business Server 2011 that lets users create collaboration sites, but it plans to move all the files on its file-share server to SharePoint Foundation collaboration sites. From there, employees

“With the mobile device security improvements in Windows Small Business Server 2011, we have better control over mobile phones and the increasing amount of company-confidential data residing on them.”

Scott Starr, Marketing Director, Firetrace International

can access them at any time, from anywhere they have an Internet connection.

The company is also going to deploy Windows Small Business Server 2011 Premium Add-on, which provides an additional Windows Server 2008 R2 license for a second server. Firetrace will place this server in its U.K. office as a domain controller, which will simplify authentication for U.K. employees and reduce frustration and support costs by allowing the U.K. office to more easily access corporate data.

Benefits

By upgrading to Windows Small Business Server 2011, Firetrace has reduced the time spent on server support so that the part-time IT staff has more time to focus on managing and expanding business growth. Higher overall reliability and tightened security for mobile devices means greater peace of mind. And anytime, anywhere access to business data yields greater employee productivity and customer responsiveness.

Two More Hours a Week to Expand the Business

With the technology management efficiencies provided by Windows Small Business Server, Starr can spend more time on his Marketing Director activities and less time dealing with technology. “Windows Small Business Server 2011 has given me back about two hours a week that I can use to do more important things than manage servers,” he says. “We’ve grown from 5 to 45 employees, and our IT department is still just two of us working part-time.

Accommodating this rapid growth is possible in part due to the continuing management improvements in Windows Small Business Server.”

Firetrace can also use its consulting dollars with itSynergy for higher impact work.

“Instead of paying itSynergy to fight mailbox database size barriers and perform other mundane tasks, we can redirect our spending with them to higher-value tasks, such as consolidating servers or setting up collaboration sites,” says Starr.

Greater Peace of Mind

Since deploying Windows Small Business Server 2011, Firetrace has had zero email downtime. “The dependability of Windows Small Business Server 2011 has been flawless,” says Starr. “We haven’t had a minute of downtime. My peace of mind is exponentially higher today. I wish I could feel this good about every server in the company.”


Enhanced Mobile Device Security

Starr and Hoffland are also enjoying greater peace of mind due to strengthened mobile device security. They worry far less about company data getting into the wrong hands when a phone is lost or stolen, and they spend less time setting up new phones. “With the mobile device security improvements in Windows Small Business Server 2011, we have better control over mobile phones and the increasing amount of company-confidential data residing on them,” Starr says.

Faster Response to Customers

While Starr and Hoffland see how Windows Small Business Server simplifies the company’s technology landscape, the other employees see the software’s value from the perspective of greater flexibility, efficiency, and productivity.

“With Windows Small Business Server 2011, we are a more productive organization,” says Starr. “Because it’s so much easier to connect to work from home or from the road, employees do it more frequently. If there are issues waiting in their inbox related to a customer problem, a



“With Windows Small Business Server 2011, we are a more productive organization. Because it’s so much easier to connect to work from home or from the road, employees do it more frequently.”

Scott Starr, Marketing Director, Firetrace International

manufacturing problem, or anything else, they can take care of it immediately instead of waiting until they’re back in the office.”

The company’s U.S.-based engineering team, for example, can now better address issues during European work hours. Recently, a European wind turbine manufacturer and Firetrace customer required a minor redesign to accommodate an emergency supplier change. The U.S. team members read the email message after work hours and made the change right away. Had the issue remained unaddressed until U.S. work hours resumed, the issue would not have been resolved until the following week, resulting in production-line stoppage for the customer’s multimillion-dollar turbines. “Nearly 50 percent of our product ends up overseas, so the ability to have greater access to work tools from any computer helps our overall pace of business,” Starr says.

Once Firetrace moves company files to SharePoint sites, employee productivity and responsiveness to customers will increase further. “Having marketing, engineering, accounting, and other documents in one central place governed by version-control policies will enable us to better and more accurately share that data within our office and with salespeople fielding calls from customers,” Starr says. “They won’t have to wait an entire workday for Scottsdale office hours; they’ll be able to access what they need at any time of the day or night. This translates into faster response to customer needs.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers in the United States and Canada who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:

www.microsoft.com

For more information about itSynergy products and services, call (602) 297-2400 or visit the website at:

www.itsynergy.com

For more information about Firetrace International products and services, call (888) 786-0780 or visit the website at:

www.firetrace.com

Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard

Designed for businesses with up to 75 users, Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard delivers enterprise-class server technology in an affordable, all-in-one solution. Help improve the security of your data with automatic backups and simple recovery tools. Easily add users, servers, and applications as your business needs evolve. Empower your employees to readily access email, contacts, and calendars to connect with customers, vendors, and suppliers from almost anywhere. With reduced complexity and increased manageability over traditional enterprise servers, Windows Small Business Server offers you a server solution that can help you focus on running a more efficient business.

For more information about Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard, go to:

www.microsoft.com/sbs

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard

Hardware

- One Dell PowerEdge T410 server with Intel Xeon processor

Partners

- itSynergy