

# UNITED NATURAL FOODS, INC.

## EMC Consulting helps major distributor consolidate five data centers and strengthen disaster recovery preparedness



### OVERVIEW

#### Challenges

- Consolidate and centralize operations within a single data center to improve efficiency and reduce operating costs
- Transform IT into a cohesive and agile organization that could better and more rapidly address current and future business needs
- Improve disaster recovery preparedness to protect business applications

#### Solutions

- EMC Consulting including: Business Impact Analysis, Migration Discovery and Analysis, assistance with the development of a virtualized infrastructure, and Managed Availability Services
- An EMC Symmetrix DMX-4 system
- VMware virtualization technology

#### Key benefits

- The ability to drive an even greater level of reliability, both in terms of the services that the company offers and in the technology that it leverages to provide those services
- Significant savings in both dollars and energy, as well as enhanced sustainability benefits by eliminating the cost of running four of its data centers, virtualizing more than 100 servers, and implementing storage tiering

United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) is nationally known for its extensive selection of competitively priced, quality products and an unwavering commitment to service and reliability. Starting out as a small regional distributor in the 1970s, UNFI has experienced tremendous growth over the years, fueled by brisk sales and a series of mergers and acquisitions. Today, it is the leading independent distributor of natural, organic, and specialty foods and related products in the United States, distributing more than 60,000 products to over 17,000 customer locations.

Not content to rest on past successes, the company is continually moving forward with new and expanded ventures to further support the mission of the business, its suppliers, customers, and the communities it serves. Currently underway are initiatives to broaden distribution channels and strengthen the company's position as a one-stop-shop that can fully meet the needs of the small independent store, major grocery chains, and everything in between.

To help achieve the goals, UNFI realized it needed a thorough assessment of its existing IT infrastructure to determine how it could best be transformed to deliver greater flexibility, efficiency, availability, and protection to business operations.

A long-time customer of EMC, UNFI chose to work with EMC® Consulting to help it develop and implement a multi-phased plan for IT consolidation, transformation, and protection.

“There is a level of trust, accountability, and mutual respect between EMC and UNFI, and that gave us the confidence to entrust EMC with a project of this magnitude and importance,” says John Stern, senior vice president and CIO.

### A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SETS THE STAGE

Through an active merger and acquisition period, UNFI absorbed a number of large data centers, each with its own architectures and processes. The company wanted to consolidate and centralize operations within a single data center to improve efficiency and reduce operating costs, and transform IT into a cohesive and agile organization that could better and more rapidly address current and future business needs. It also wanted to improve disaster recovery (DR) preparedness to protect business applications.

Setting the course for the entire initiative, EMC Consulting conducted a comprehensive assessment of UNFI's data center environment. A Business Impact Analysis was conducted to determine which applications were most business-critical and to establish recovery-time objectives (RTOs) and recovery-point objectives (RPOs) for all applications. This information was used to develop UNFI's enhanced business continuity and disaster recovery strategy.

It also played a role in the development of a storage service catalog, which provided a methodology to align all applications to the appropriate level of service across different storage tiers, for optimum operational efficiency and savings.

“Going through an analysis to understand exactly which applications would be needed in the event of a disaster enabled us to tailor our approach,” says Joshua Sigel, vice president of IT Operations and Applied Technologies. “Because it’s not a one-size-fits-all solution, it also saves costs.”

To further reduce the hardware footprint in the primary data center, EMC Consulting assisted UNFI with the development of a virtualized infrastructure, designed to consolidate the majority of the company’s physical servers within a more compact virtual environment.

## **BEST-IN-CLASS STORAGE AND VIRTUALIZATION TECHNOLOGY MAKES IT ALL POSSIBLE**

UNFI’s consolidation efforts are built around a highly flexible EMC Symmetrix® DMX™-4 storage system which has replaced two Symmetrix DMX-3 systems and non-EMC storage arrays. This multi-tiered storage solution, designed for performance, availability, petabyte scalability, energy efficiency, and easy management, enables UNFI to efficiently and cost-effectively accommodate a diverse range of information management requirements. It is also the foundation for the company’s disaster recovery strategy. To help UNFI achieve its high-availability objectives, a disaster recovery program office was set up to leverage Managed Availability Services (MAS) from EMC Consulting.

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JOHN STERN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND CIO

“We wanted an organization that would be accountable for the services provided as well as the infrastructure implemented for our disaster recovery,” says Sigel. “EMC could be depended upon for both.”

Fully integrated and easily managed, UNFI has been able to consolidate five major data centers into a single, operationally efficient, state-of-the-art IT infrastructure, with the flexibility to accommodate its future needs for years to come.

## **CONSOLIDATION HELPS ENABLE GREEN EFFORTS**

From an ecological point-of-view, the consolidation and virtualization of UNFI’s IT environment has helped to lower power, cooling, and space demands significantly.

In addition, all of the new hardware deployed to support this effort, from the Energy Star-rated servers supporting the virtualized environment to the energy efficiency of the new DMX-4 system, contribute to a “greener” IT infrastructure. Even the data center, housed in a 300,000-plus square foot warehouse, uses solar energy from UNFI-owned solar panels at its Dayville, Connecticut, distribution center to help power the IT environment.

“Reducing our footprint and our heating and cooling demands by essentially unplugging and virtualizing servers are positive impacts from a green perspective,” says Tom Dziki, Chief Human Resources Officer and SVP Sustainability. “Though green benefits didn’t necessarily drive the project, much like everything we do at UNFI, they were interwoven in it.”

## THE BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH A BUSINESS PARTNER

UNFI knew that to be successful on a project of this magnitude, it would need a true business partnership—one where members from each company could work together seamlessly, sharing knowledge and expertise as they focused on common goals and objectives.

EMC's program management office coordinated all aspects of the consolidation, transformation, and protection project, ensuring that the right teams with the right skill sets and expertise were deployed to tackle the job at hand. There were project leads over each of the work streams and a project manager overseeing the entire mission.

"It's very difficult to set sail on a project of this size, anticipate every problem, and have a way of addressing those up front," says Sigel. "We knew EMC would help us address any issues that surfaced."

## A STRATEGY TO SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN BUSINESS

From major retailers to small independent stores, customers want to know that they can consistently rely on their suppliers.

For UNFI, this project has enabled the company to drive an even greater level of reliability, both in terms of the services that it offers and in the technology that it leverages to provide those services.

By eliminating the costs of running four of its data centers, virtualizing more than 100 servers and implementing storage tiering, UNFI anticipates significant savings in both dollars and energy, as well as enhanced sustainability benefits.

"We wanted to make infrastructure investments in areas of our business that would add direct and immediate value to our customers," says Sigel. "The infrastructure work that was done was a milestone in establishing a solid foundation of efficiency, reliability, and green computing from which we can build upon as our company continues to expand."

### TAKE THE NEXT STEP

To learn how EMC products, services, and solutions can help solve your business and IT challenges, contact your local representative or authorized reseller—or visit us at [www.EMC.com](http://www.EMC.com).

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