

Looking to bolster the web experience for its customers and Independent Business Owners, online retailer is sold on the HP BladeSystem

Quixtar, Inc.



"I'm not sure we could run our business today with the number of people we have on our server team if we weren't using the HP BladeSystem."

– IT Infrastructure Manager Steve Keselring, Quixtar, Inc.

Executive summary:

Founded in 1999, Quixtar, Inc. offers entrepreneurs the ability to have a web-based business of their own through Quixtar's Independent Business Ownership Plan. Quixtar allows Independent Business Owners (IBOs) to market their products and manage their businesses via the Internet. The IBOs earn income based on sales made through Quixtar. For Quixtar, success largely depends upon response time and the fresh content on the web servers. A positive web experience has customers finding and ordering products quickly and conveniently. Quixtar's IT team has deployed software that updates content on an hourly basis.

In the beginning, Quixtar based their entire infrastructure on the HP (Compaq) ProLiant 1850 R6/500 servers. Over the next few years they upgraded to HP ProLiant DL380 servers. Then in 2003, the decision was made to migrate to a blade environment. The initial upgrade involved 56 HP ProLiant BL20p servers, but the process is ongoing. Today, Quixtar has 206 HP ProLiant BL20p servers in their two data centers. In 2006, they expect to purchase 6 to 8 additional blade enclosures. With the help of HP management tools, the HP BladeSystem has helped Quixtar become much more agile, moving boxes to areas of business where they are most needed.

The challenge: a more flexible, more versatile environment.

The most critical element of Quixtar's business is its online commerce. The customers must have a good shopping experience; therefore, the web site performance is mission critical. In the past, when it was time to upgrade, the team simply deployed new racks of discrete servers. While the approach worked, it lacked the flexibility they desired. When the need to upgrade the environment arose again in 2003, Quixtar realized they would have to put in 5 or 6 new racks in their data center. Steve Keselring, IT Infrastructure Manager for Quixtar, discusses the challenges his team faced.

- **"Space, power and man-hours were becoming issues."** Adding 5 or 6 more racks was going to create a real estate problem at the data center. Power was an issue only in that with 6 racks, there are a lot more individual circuits needed to power up each one. "Plus, we knew going into it that we'd need reinforcements for the server team to install all of the servers," said Keselring.
- **"We needed to be more nimble and able to respond to changes in the business."** The traditional rack-mounted approach with discrete servers allowed Quixtar to maintain web performance as needed. But it didn't give Keselring's team the freedom they desired to react to new directives. "Ideally we wanted the flexibility to quickly and efficiently repurpose computing power in response to a new sales promotion or program."

- **“We wanted to eliminate the need to physically be at the server.”** In the past, it was fairly common for staff to drive to the 2nd data center to stand in front of a device, thus eating up time that could be spent on projects that grow the business. Now, Quixtar’s server team has 6 people supporting some 500 servers. The company still has two data centers, but the operations staff resides at only one.

The solution and success:

a more adaptive, more responsive data center

When it came time to upgrade the Webserver farms, Keselring’s team at Quixtar looked at many blades on the market. They determined that in addition to deploying the latest technology and solving some space problems, the HP BladeSystem gave them the flexibility they required with either switch attached enclosures or direct Ethernet attachment. The HP BladeSystem also allows the IT staff to repurpose computing power when and where needed. The use of HP Management tools such as HP Systems Insight Manager, HP ProLiant Essentials Rapid Deployment Pack, and HP Integrated Lights Out has helped the IT staff manage their environment more efficiently than ever.

- **“The HP BladeSystem really shines in a server farm supporting a web site.”** Quixtar needs a substantial number of servers to support the different layers of their web site. Their blade environment is laid out in such a way they’re able to separate the product-searching portion of the web site from the checkout/order area. “Based on monthly trends,” said Keselring, “we’re able to move our devices to the area where they are needed the most.”
- **“Deployment is much faster. We’re able to take our highly trained technical staff out of racking and stacking, allowing them to concentrate on things that are more productive and aligned with our business goals.”** Prior to using the HP BladeSystem and HP Rapid Deployment Pack (RDP), servers were deployed in six hours. But according to Keselring and his staff, RDP has helped them reduce server build-time across the board by more than 75%. “Installation of a new server is as easy as sliding a blade into an existing enclosure. You’re not standing in front of the machine feeding it media. While you’re building multiple machines, sometimes 10 to 12 at the same time, you’re also on the phone or generating reports.”



- **“HP iLO, which allows you to troubleshoot a problem remotely, has been a big time-saver for us.”** “Once we put in the HP server blades and became more proficient with Systems Insight Manager (SIM) and the use of HP iLO, we’ve become much more efficient both in our server tech area and in our data center operations,” said Keselring. “Server technicians can manage the environment and make changes from their desks, or even from home if needed. Time between a failure occurring and getting it resolved has been reduced by about 70% in most cases.
- **“The use of HP Systems Insight Manager (SIM) has made our entire environment more efficient.”** Through the use of HP SIM, Quixtar’s IT team is now more comfortable than ever working with the HP ProLiant BL20p servers in the data center. The team appreciates having a single console view of all components and is able to support and administer the blades without additional training on either the technical side or detailed instructions for operational staff.
- **“One of the selling factors for us was the HP Bladesystem’s flexibility to connect to our existing network.”** According to Keselring, he felt that other technology providers had a very rigid, almost a proprietary type of a network connection. The HP Bladesystem allowed Quixtar to use their existing network environment, which was configured for high-speed internet access. Keselring added that the RJ45 patch panels on the back of the enclosures were a good fit for them.

About Quixtar, Inc.

Quixtar Inc., a subsidiary of Alticor Inc., is a business opportunity company that offers entrepreneurs the ability to have a web-based business of their own. Through Quixtar's Independent Business Ownership Plan, individuals are rewarded for product sales resulting from their business-building efforts.

Since 1999, Independent Business Owners powered by Quixtar have generated more than \$5.7 billion in sales, earning in excess of \$1.7 billion in bonuses and other incentives. Their efforts have made Quixtar the number one retailer in the online Health & Beauty category based on sales, and 14th among all e-commerce sites, according to Internet Retailer's "Top 400 Guide".

Based near Grand Rapids, Mich., Quixtar currently supports independent businesses in the U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico, and various trust territories and independent island nations in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and Caribbean Sea. Quixtar Canada Corp. headquarters are located in London, Ont., Canada. Visit Quixtar at <http://www.quixtar-inc.com>.

Challenges

- Add performance to web site
- Address space concerns in data center
- Reduce time for deployment
- Eliminate the need to have IT staff physically at server for maintenance
- Build a more flexible, more adaptive data center to address business changes

Solution

- Hardware:
 - 206 HP ProLiant BL20p servers
 - Additional 6-8 racks of HP ProLiant BL20p servers in early 2006
- Software:
 - HP Systems Insight Manager (SIM) for server management
 - HP ProLiant Essentials Rapid Deployment Pack (RDP)
 - HP Integrated Lights Out (iLO) for remote management

Results

- Added flexibility: can quickly move machines between server farms as needed
- Expanded capability and responsiveness of data center without adding space
- Reduced deployment time (racking and stacking and feeding media)
- Freed up IT staff for projects more in line with business model
- Eliminated need for staff to be at the server; remote management has become the norm

** This customer's results depended upon its unique business and IT environment, the way it used HP products and services and other factors. These results may not be typical; your results may vary.*

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