storage as it means we can bolt a new tray of disks out of the box in 15 minutes. Dell’s servers are very easy to install, and because we use Dell’s KACE tools, it means that from London we can provision a virtual server within minutes and give it to the business within the hour,” he adds.

PensionsFirst is now on its second data center to help cope with its ever-increasing demand and business growth. "Dell’s support has been vital for this growth," says Newman, pointing out that one of the strengths of the association with Dell has been the range of its contacts within the wider IT community. "Dell has a great relationship with other Tier 1 companies, such as Fy Networks or VMware — that helps us a great deal."

"The two data centers are based around a mixture of physical and virtual servers," Newman adds. "Across the entire estate we have about 200 servers — that’s a mixture of blade architecture with virtualized servers. We have physical servers for the very large databases that can’t be virtualized and we have the high-end servers for modelling that can’t be virtualized as it requires high processing power."

The power of one

One key element of the success at PensionsFirst is that Dell is the central supplier, meaning that Newman doesn’t have to deal with a variety of vendors. "I like the idea of having one point of contact for problem resolution," he says. "I don’t have multiple vendors to manage."

PensionsFirst also has leveraged Dell’s ProSupport for Mission Critical IT to ensure that the systems are running without interruption. "It’s been critical — it’s given a small business with a limited IT team access to a small army of experts."

PensionsFirst also uses Dell support to handle application problems. "Their subject matter experts are all in the same room so I’ve had situations where I’ve had several of Dell’s major partners all putting their heads together to sort out a problem. If I phoned a vendor on my own, they’d say it could be a driver problem or something else. With Dell, I feel they want to sort it out. One of the best things about Dell’s support is the four-hour, mission-critical-response. What it means is that if you virtualize with Dell’s blade servers then the combined density in those is the equivalent of three-quarters of a rack full of servers and we’re only sharing nine fans and six power supplies," says Newman. "It’s part of our ethos to be energy efficient."

The company is also in the process of taking virtualization to a new level by exploring desktop virtualization. "This means that the desktop resides in the data center, not in the headquarter. So if we’re doing an office move then people can just pick up where they left off, or if we had an event that impacted our operational business, we’d relocate to our business continuity center and literally log on to what we were doing when we left,”

"Meanwhile, growth continues unabated at PensionsFirst, which opened a New York office last December. Part of the company’s growth includes exploring emerging technologies, and Dell helps out here too. "We are always looking to new technologies to manage costs," Newman notes. "Data de-duplication is one. Having data centers that use active SAN replication over wide areas is another. As your data volumes grow, keeping them synchronized is a problem and while you can look at putting a big pipe between the two, that’s an expensive option."

Newman says that thanks to Dell’s relationships with other vendors, PensionsFirst has started to look at a product from Fy called WOM that sends only recent changes over the WAN. This minimizes the volumes of data to be synchronized. He says that the company had also started experimenting with high performance computing and cloud services and expects those trials to continue in the future.

"Dell has been more than a vendor," says Newman. "Dell is an important partner of ours and I don’t think we’d be in the technical position we are now without them."

― Dean Newman, director of information technology at PensionsFirst

Common sense virtualization

Like many organizations these days, PensionsFirst is a keen proponent of virtualization but the company does not follow the usual pattern. "We don’t tend to follow the normal route for virtualization, which is about consolidating servers. We didn’t have an existing estate to consolidate," Newman says. "But there are still advantages of virtualization. We can provision servers much faster through virtualization; we segregate our customer data, and it has an interesting security slant — we use it in a novel way," he says.

"It’s not just security that’s important to PensionsFirst. There are other advantages, too, particularly when it comes to real estate and energy efficiency. "The big plus is that if you virtualize with Dell’s blade servers then the combined density in those is the equivalent of three-quarters of a rack full of servers and we’re only sharing nine fans and six power supplies," says Newman. "It’s part of our ethos to be energy efficient."

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Dell KACE management tools going mobile.

Dell is updating KACE systems management products to help IT support iPhones, iPads, and Android devices on the network.

IT departments are dealing with an avalanche of smartphones and tablets that are inundating company networks.

Fortunately, Dell is updating its KACE systems management products to help IT departments deal with the onslaught.

According to company founder Michael Dell, “It’s critical to be able to manage all devices, whether they are client devices or mobile devices, and that’s a challenge we want to address.”

Smartphones are “basically small computers” and “somewhat insecure,” Dell said, and IT departments need assistance managing them.

Dell will extend the KACE products to include support for the Apple iPhone and iPad, as well as tablets and smartphones based on Google’s Android OS.

Dell acquired KACE in February 2010 as part of a wider effort to expand its business beyond PCs. Since then it has increased its customer base by 900, to about 2,300, and tripled the size of its support staff, including the addition of new support centers in Asia and Japan.

James Nicolai, IDC News Service/San Francisco Bureau

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Dell seeks services boost with new security offerings.

Dell is introducing a security services portfolio for mid-size businesses that includes managed security services through its partnership with SecureWorks.

Dell recently beefed up its security offerings with new hardware and services, which could help the company to strike more long-term service engagements with customers.

Founder Michael Dell stated, “The security offerings are part of a new product portfolio targeted at medium-size businesses. This new portfolio brings together security management, deployment and vulnerability assessment tools to protect data and IT infrastructures.”

Paula Altmair, vice president for small- and medium-business solutions at Dell added, “In the past Dell has tended to be hardware-centric and sell the box and the services close to the box. Our focus is not just hardware, but software and services.”

The portfolio includes managed security services through a partnership with SecureWorks. SecureWorks will provide the hardware, which will work with industry-standard services, clients and networking gear.

By Agam Shah, IDC News Service/New York Bureau

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