
Implementing SharePoint Server 2010 on Dell vStart Solution

*A Reference Architecture for a 3500 concurrent users SharePoint
Server 2010 farm on vStart 100 Hyper-V Solution.*

Dell Global Solutions Engineering

Revision: A01

May 2012



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May 2012 | Rev A01

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Executive summary

A Microsoft® SharePoint® Server 2010 farm hosts the core platform services and applications that enable multiple capabilities for its users. Since its deployment usually employs a multi-tier architecture, it is important that the IT decision makers and administrators carefully plan to ensure service availability and accommodate future growth.

This paper discusses the implementation of a virtualized SharePoint 2010 farm on top of the Dell vStart solution including the architecture, benefits and the trade-offs in leveraging the underlying vStart design principles and best practices. Dell vStart is an integrated virtualization infrastructure solution that enables IT and business stakeholders to accelerate application and IT service delivery. Designed for reliability, vStart eliminates single points of failure and incorporates redundancy into all mission critical components.

Key benefits from the Integration between Microsoft SharePoint 2010 and vStart 100m, Dell's pre-built virtualization solution configured for Microsoft Hyper-V, include:

- **Faster time to value:** Leveraging vStart infrastructure for a SharePoint Server 2010 farm deployment enables faster time-to-value¹ for the SharePoint application.
- **High Availability:** The underlying vStart design along with application best practices² helps ensure high availability of all SharePoint farm roles.
- **Performance and scale to support mid to large organizations:** The SharePoint Server 2010 virtualized farm architecture in this paper was validated on up to 3500 concurrent users with a farm response time of 0.1 seconds and approximately 285 requests per second with a collaboration usage profile.

Additional information on SharePoint 2010 design and deployment best practices is available from www.dell.com/sharepoint.

¹ Benefits with vStart - A case study: <http://en.community.dell.com/dell-blogs/enterprise/b/inside-enterprise-it/archive/2012/02/27/broadart-achieves-rapid-virtualization-benefits-with-vstart.aspx>

² SharePoint Server 2010 - Infrastructure Planning and Deployment guides: <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/gg581794.aspx>

Introduction

IT decision-makers and administrators routinely balance business demands for rapid deployment against infrastructure imperatives such as meticulous planning for required capacity, developing best practices for application deployment and providing scalability for future growth.

Dell vStart is a pre-integrated virtualization infrastructure solution that enables IT and business stakeholders to accelerate application and IT service delivery, while addressing infrastructure imperatives. With an infrastructure that is up and running within days, the IT department can rapidly deploy their applications and start delivering value to their customers.

This paper discusses how vStart 100 Hyper-V solution can be used to deploy a virtualized SharePoint 2010 farm, as well as the best practices and trade-offs in this approach.

Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010

Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 builds on the capabilities that were offered in Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, which provides a rich platform for collaboration, information sharing, and document management. SharePoint 2010 adds several new features, and introduces important architectural changes and product improvements.

A SharePoint server farm is a collection of servers that collectively provide the services required by a SharePoint deployment. Some of these services, or sets of services, comprise predefined roles, and must be configured within the solution. Other services and components are optional, but they provide additional features and functionality that are often desirable. These optional components may include service applications, such as managed metadata and Excel services. Some constraints and best practices help determine which components should be located on each server in the farm. Also, by considering how the components are distributed, a SharePoint farm can be designed to easily accommodate later growth.

NOTE: In SharePoint Server 2010, components generally provide functionality for a given service application. As a result, this paper may use the terms *role* and *component* interchangeably. In this context, SharePoint roles refer to one or more components that provide a farm service, and should not be confused with Windows Server roles, which generally include one or more Windows services to provide operating system functionality.

The size and capacity of a SharePoint 2010 implementation vary based on several factors, such as the number of concurrent users, service applications in the farm, the expected uptime service-level agreement (SLA), and others. These factors dictate how many servers are needed in the SharePoint farm and how the overall farm architecture looks. Based on these factors, SharePoint Server 2010 farm implementations can be classified as small farm³, medium farm⁴ and a large farm⁵ deployments.

³ SharePoint 2010 - Designing and implementing a small farm:
<http://i.dell.com/sites/content/business/solutions/whitepapers/en/Documents/dell-small-sharepoint-farm.pdf>

⁴ SharePoint 2010 - Designing and implementing a medium farm:
http://www.dell.com/downloads/global/services/dell_medium_sharepoint_farm.pdf

For more information on the Dell SharePoint reference architecture guidance, performance sizing and best practices, refer to the white papers available at <http://www.dell.com/sharepoint>.

Dell vStart solution

Dell vStart is a virtualization solution that enables IT and business stakeholders to accelerate application and IT service delivery. It is a pre-engineered and pre-built solution with Dell PowerEdge servers, Dell EqualLogic Storage, Dell PowerConnect Networking, and Dell Management software delivered with a complete deployment and support services. The solution leverages a choice of VMware vSphere or Microsoft Hyper-V virtualization platforms. The solutions vary based upon the amount of server and storage resources.

The vStart solutions enable organizations to get started with the application workload deployment without the need for extensive design and configuration cycles by leveraging the experience of Dell in virtualization infrastructure, which allows for rapid deployment. The vStart solution is offered as three configurations: vStart 50⁶, 100⁷ and 200⁸.

⁵ SharePoint 2010 - Designing and implementing a large farm

http://www.dell.com/downloads/global/services/dell_large_sharepoint_farm.pdf

⁶ Dell vStart 50 Product Details: <http://www.dell.com/us/enterprise/p/dell-vstart-50/pd>

⁷ Dell vStart 100 Product Details: <http://www.dell.com/us/enterprise/p/dell-vstart-v100/pd>

⁸ Dell vStart 200 Product Details: <http://www.dell.com/us/enterprise/p/dell-vstart-v200/pd>

The following table shows a high level overview of these product offerings and the hardware and software components:

Table 1 High level overview of vStart offerings

	Hypervisor	Hypervisor servers	Storage arrays	Management host	Ethernet switch
vStart 50	Windows Server 2008 R2 SP1 Data Center Edition with Hyper-V role enabled ⁹ or VMware ESXi ¹⁰	2x Dell PowerEdge R620	Up to 2x Dell EqualLogic PS4100X	Dell PowerEdge R410 (Optional) Windows Server 2008 R2 Datacenter Edition	4x PowerConnect 7024 or 6224
vStart 100	Windows Server 2008 R2 SP1 Data Center Edition with Hyper-V role enabled or VMware ESXi	3x Dell PowerEdge R720	Up to 2x Dell EqualLogic PS6100X	Dell PowerEdge R620 Windows Server 2008 R2 Datacenter Edition	4x PowerConnect 7048 or 6248
vStart 200	Windows Server 2008 R2 SP1 Data Center Edition with Hyper-V role enabled or VMware ESXi	6x Dell PowerEdge R720	Up to 3x Dell EqualLogic PS6100X	Dell PowerEdge R620 Windows Server 2008 R2 Datacenter Edition	4x PowerConnect 7048 or 6248

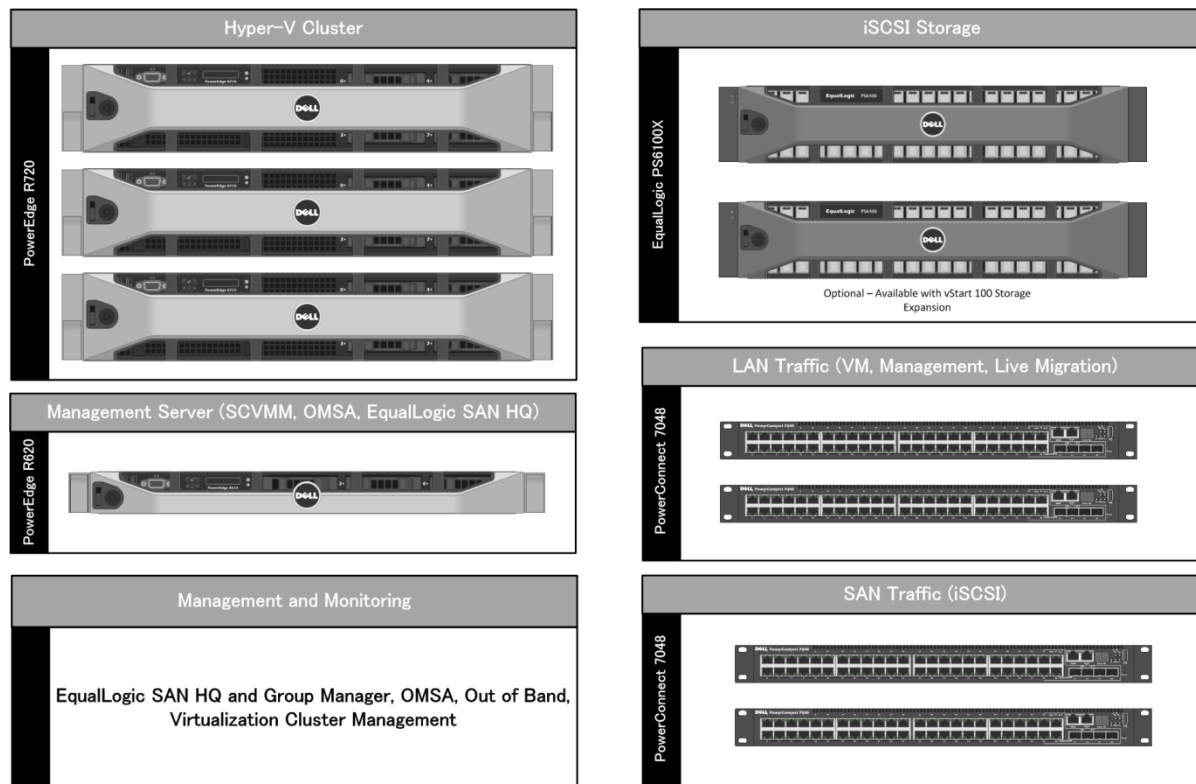
The management server - which is an optional component of the vStart solution - comes prepackaged with the EqualLogic storage management and monitoring software SAN Head Quarters (SAN HQ) and OpenManage PRO and Action packs for Microsoft System Center Virtual Machine Manager (SCVMM).

This solution also includes Dell OpenManage Server Administrator on the management server and virtualization hosts for managing and monitoring the physical hardware. The Dell iDRAC 7 enterprise is used for out-of-band management of the Dell PowerEdge servers. The other components include Redundant Power Supplies (RPS) for the network switches and the Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) for additional redundancy and protection against power failure.

⁹ The vStart solutions using Microsoft Hyper-V are represented as vStart 50m, vStart 100m, and vStart 200m

¹⁰ The vStart solutions using VMware ESXi are represented as vStart 50v, vStart 100v, and vStart 200v

Figure 1 vStart 100 solution components



This reference architecture paper used the vStart 100 solution with Microsoft Hyper-V on the hypervisor servers. The components of this solution architecture are as shown in Figure 1. Therefore, all references to vStart in the subsequent sections of this paper refer to the vStart 100m solution.

For a detailed technical overview of vStart offerings, refer to the [“Dell vStart 100 and 200 Hyper-V reference architecture”](#).

SharePoint on vStart

As a pre-configured and pre-validated solution, vStart is a suitable choice for a virtualized SharePoint 2010 farm deployment. The solution is designed so that there is no single point of failure and redundancy is incorporated into all mission critical components of the solution. Leveraging the underlying vStart infrastructure design principles and best practices enables fast time-to-value and rapid deployment of SharePoint application.

The SharePoint 2010 farm implementation used in this reference architecture builds on top of the vStart 100m and leverages the underlying best practices for storage and networking implementation in a highly virtualized environment.

The following sections of this paper provide architectural details on this implementation, references to the SharePoint application best practices, and a discussion on how some of the vStart design principles complement the SharePoint deployment.

Solution architecture

As mentioned earlier and shown in Figure 1, the vStart 100m elements and architecture was leveraged for deploying SharePoint 2010 farm. As a part of the farm architecture—described in table 1—three Dell PowerEdge R720 servers were used as the hypervisor servers. A Dell PowerEdge R620 server was used as a management host for managing and monitoring the vStart infrastructure.

The hardware configuration of the hypervisor servers - Dell PowerEdge R720 - is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Hardware configuration of hypervisor servers

	Components	Details
Processor	Intel® Xeon® E5-2660 2.2GHz 8 core, 20MB L3 Cache, Turbo, Hyper Threading	Two Intel Xeon E5-2660s are populated in the two sockets
Memory	96GB (12 x 8GB) RDIMMS	DDR3, 1600 MHz Dual Ranked RDIMMS
Network controller	Broadcom 5720 rNDC Ethernet Controller	rNDC provides four 1Gb Ethernet ports
	1 x Broadcom 5719 Quad Port 1Gb network controller	Add-in NIC, which provide four 1Gb Ethernet ports
Hypervisor	Windows Server 2008 R2 SP1 with Hyper-V role enabled	Datacenter Edition
Out-of-band (OOB) management	iDRAC7 Enterprise	For remote management of the Hyper-V host servers

NOTE: The SharePoint farm implementation requires prerequisites such as Active Directory (AD) Domain Services (AD DS) and Domain Name Server (DNS). These components are not a part of the vStart infrastructure and not shown in this paper as a part of the reference architecture. Customers implementing SharePoint must have these components before starting SharePoint deployment.

The SharePoint 2010 farm server roles were implemented as virtual machines on top of the hypervisor servers in the vStart infrastructure.

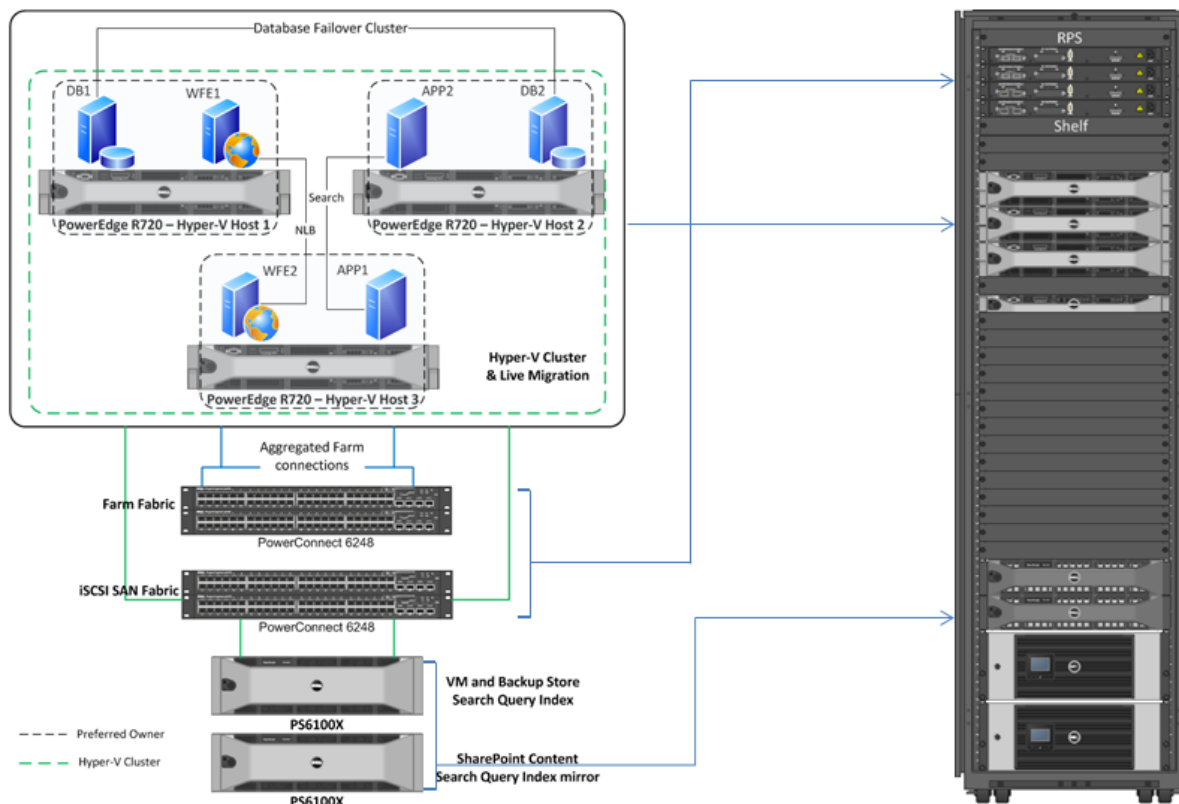
Windows Server 2008 R2 Failover clustering¹¹ feature was used with Hyper-V role to enable fault tolerance at the server level. Cluster Shared Volumes¹² (CSV) is implemented on the Hyper-V cluster to allow multiple virtual machines to access the same volume and migrate to any host in the cluster. By using CSV, features such as Live Migration—movement of VM from one host to another without any perceivable downtime—and VM failover were enabled to make virtual machines highly available within the Hyper-V cluster.

The following diagram shows a high level overview of the SharePoint 2010 farm deployment on the vStart virtualized infrastructure.

¹¹ Using Hyper-V and Failover Clustering: [http://technet.microsoft.com/enus/library/cc732181\(WS.10\).aspx](http://technet.microsoft.com/enus/library/cc732181(WS.10).aspx)

¹² Using Live migration with Cluster Shared Volumes: [http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/dd446679\(WS.10\).aspx](http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/dd446679(WS.10).aspx)

Figure 2 SharePoint 2010 on vStart - High level architecture overview



As shown in Figure 2, the SharePoint 2010 farm roles were placed across all three available hypervisor servers in the Hyper-V cluster. This recommended placement of virtual machines enables equal load on all the hypervisor servers. For each virtual machine in the Hyper-V cluster, preferred node configuration ensures that the virtual machines always start on their preferred node. Also, the preferred node configuration allows specification of the failover node to which the VM must move in case of any Hyper-V host level failure. This configuration ensures the overall Hyper-V cluster is equally loaded even in the case of a Hyper-V node failure. The following table shows the preferred owner and failover node configuration for each SharePoint farm role in this architecture.

Table 3 SharePoint 2010 farm role placement and failover configuration

SharePoint farm role	Preferred owner	Preferred failover node
Web Front-End 1 (WFE1)	Hyper-V Host 1	Hyper-V Host 2
Web Front-End 2 (WFE2)	Hyper-V Host 3	Hyper-V Host 2
Application Server 1 (APP1)	Hyper-V Host 3	Hyper-V Host 1
Application Server 2 (APP2)	Hyper-V Host 2	Hyper-V Host 1
Database Server 1 (DB1)	Hyper-V Host 1	Hyper-V Host 3
Database Server 2 (DB2)	Hyper-V Host 2	Hyper-V Host 3

The failback configuration was enabled to ensure that the virtual machines (or SharePoint farm roles) failback to the preferred nodes once the failed node state gets restored to normal state. This allows movement of virtual machines back to the preferred nodes to balance the virtual machines across the Hyper-V Cluster. However, failing back a virtual machine to a preferred node involves saving the state of the virtual machine and restoring the same on preferred owner. This causes disruption in service

while the failback process is in progress. To avoid disruption of service for any critical applications, the automatic failback was configured to occur only during non-peak hours. However, live migration can be performed manually to failback the virtual machines to the preferred node without causing any service disruption.

As shown in Figure 2, the two EqualLogic PS6100X storage arrays were used as two different storage pools to isolate the VM store from SharePoint databases. In this architecture, the first EqualLogic array was used for storing Clustered Shared Volume Quorum, Clustered Shared Volume for storing virtual machine configuration, virtual machine hard disk files, SharePoint search query index, and as a backup location for the SharePoint content stored on the second array. The second array—along with production SharePoint content—was used to store the mirrored copies of the search query index. This allows data protection by separating the VM store from where the SharePoint production databases are stored. Also, these arrays are equipped with redundant storage controllers and power supplies to protect against any power or controller failures.

NOTE: Backup and recovery procedures or tools are not a part of the vStart infrastructure or discussed in this paper. This needs careful planning to protect the SharePoint farm against any unexpected failures at the storage subsystem.

In this SharePoint farm deployment, RAID 10 was configured on the EqualLogic storage arrays. It is also the recommended¹³ RAID type for storing SharePoint content. RAID 10 generally provides better performance in random I/O situations and provides efficient disk rebuild process in the case of a drive failure scenario.

Network architecture

The network traffic in this Sharepoint 2010 solution is comprised of eight distinct types:

- Pre-Configured Hypervisor Networks
 - Live Migration network
 - Hyper-V Cluster Private Network
 - Hyper-V Host Management Network
 - Out-of-Band Management network
- VM networks for SharePoint
 - SharePoint Farm network
 - SQL Cluster Private communication
 - iSCSI network for SQL Database, Search Index, and CSV access
 - Web Front-End NLB cluster communication

The vStart infrastructure provides two separate networks created to support the network types described above:

LAN - Local Area Network - This network supports Hyper-V host management, Farm network, Live Migration, Hyper-V Cluster Private, SQL Cluster Private Communication, WFE NLB Communication, and

¹³ Choosing RAID types for SharePoint 2010 SQL Storage: <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc298801.aspx#Section33>

out-of-band management. In addition, uplinks to core infrastructure provide connectivity to the solution support services (AD, DNS, NTP, and database for management applications).

SAN - Storage Area Network - This network supports iSCSI data. Uplinks are supported to connect into an existing iSCSI network; however, these uplinks are not required for full solution functionality. SAN switch out-of-band management also occurs on this network.

The following sections include an in-depth discussion of the farm and iSCSI SAN network architecture used in the SharePoint deployment.

LAN architecture

The LAN includes two PowerConnect 7048 switches, which support Farm, Management, Hyper-V Cluster Private, SQL Cluster Private, WFE NLB, Live Migration, and OOB traffic. These traffic types are logically separated through the use of VLANs.

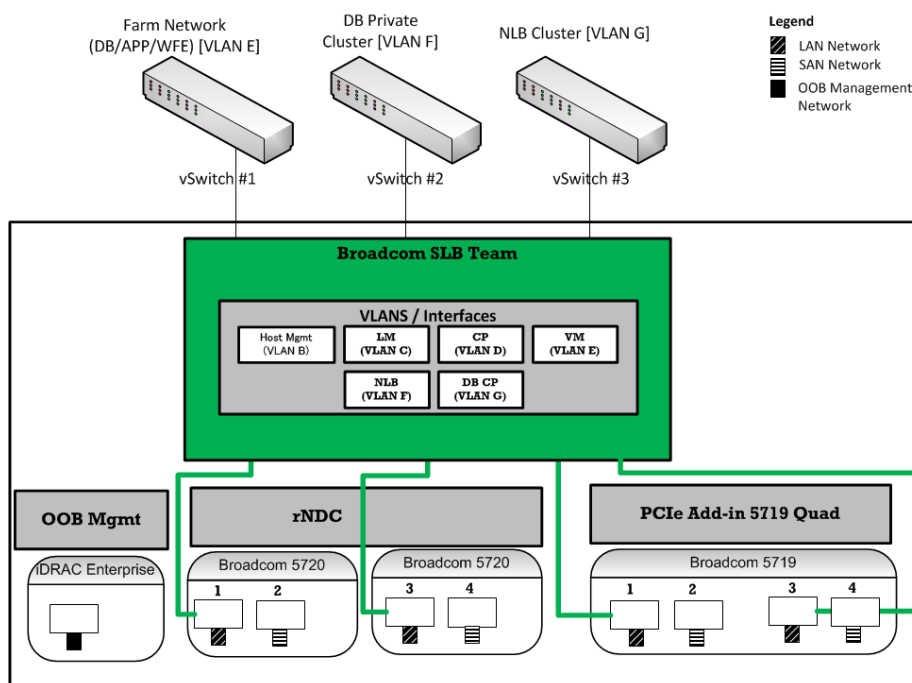
The two switches used for farm connectivity were stacked together, which forms a single logical switch and provides a 64 GB link between the two PowerConnect 7048 switches. The solution provides four 1 GB uplinks from each switch to link into an existing core network infrastructure.

As shown in Figure 3 (below), the traffic on the LAN is segregated into seven virtual LANs (VLANs); one VLAN each for:

- VM/ Farm traffic
- Hyper-V Host Management traffic
- Live Migration traffic
- SQL Cluster Private traffic
- Hyper-V Cluster Private
- SharePoint NLB traffic
- OOB traffic

VLAN tagging was performed through switch tagging as well as host level tagging.

Figure 3 LAN network architecture - High level overview



Also, a combination of Network Daughter Card (NDC) and add-in NIC ports was used for the LAN traffic and a Smart Load Balanced (SLB) network team was created with these network ports on each of the Hyper-V cluster nodes. This enables fault tolerance against any physical link failures at either NDC or the add-in NIC.

NOTE: The VLAN details for OOB management traffic is not shown in Figure 3 as the OOB traffic does not use the NDC or add-in NIC ports on the Hyper-V host. Instead, the OOB traffic uses the iDRAC 7 network interface available separately.

Three different Hyper-V virtual network switches were created based on the network traffic segregation provided by VLANs. The following table shows the mapping of VLANs to virtual switches and the purpose of these VLANs in the SharePoint architecture:

Table 4 VLAN to virtual switch mapping - LAN

VLAN name	Virtual switch name	Purpose	Virtual machine mapping
VLAN_B_Host_Management	NA	Used only for the Hyper-V host management. Not used by the SharePoint farm roles or virtual machines.	NA
VLAN_C_Live_Migration			
VLAN_D_Cluster_Private			
VLAN_E_VM_Farm	vSwitch#1	Used for SharePoint farm communication by all the SharePoint farm role virtual machines.	WFE1, WFE2, APP1, APP2, DB1, and DB2

VLAN name	Virtual switch name	Purpose	Virtual machine mapping
VLAN_F_DB_Cluster	vSwitch#2	Used by SQL DB servers in the SharePoint farm for the SQL failover cluster private communication.	DB1 and DB2
VLAN_G_WFE_NLB	vSwitch#3	Used by WFE servers in the SharePoint farm for the NLB cluster communication.	WFE1 and WFE2

The VLAN segregation for the different network types helps isolate the traffic among components of the SharePoint farm. Also, as an application best practice, all the SharePoint 2010 farm roles on any of the three Hyper-V cluster hosts communicate using the same virtual switch –vSwitch#1 in this architecture.

SAN architecture

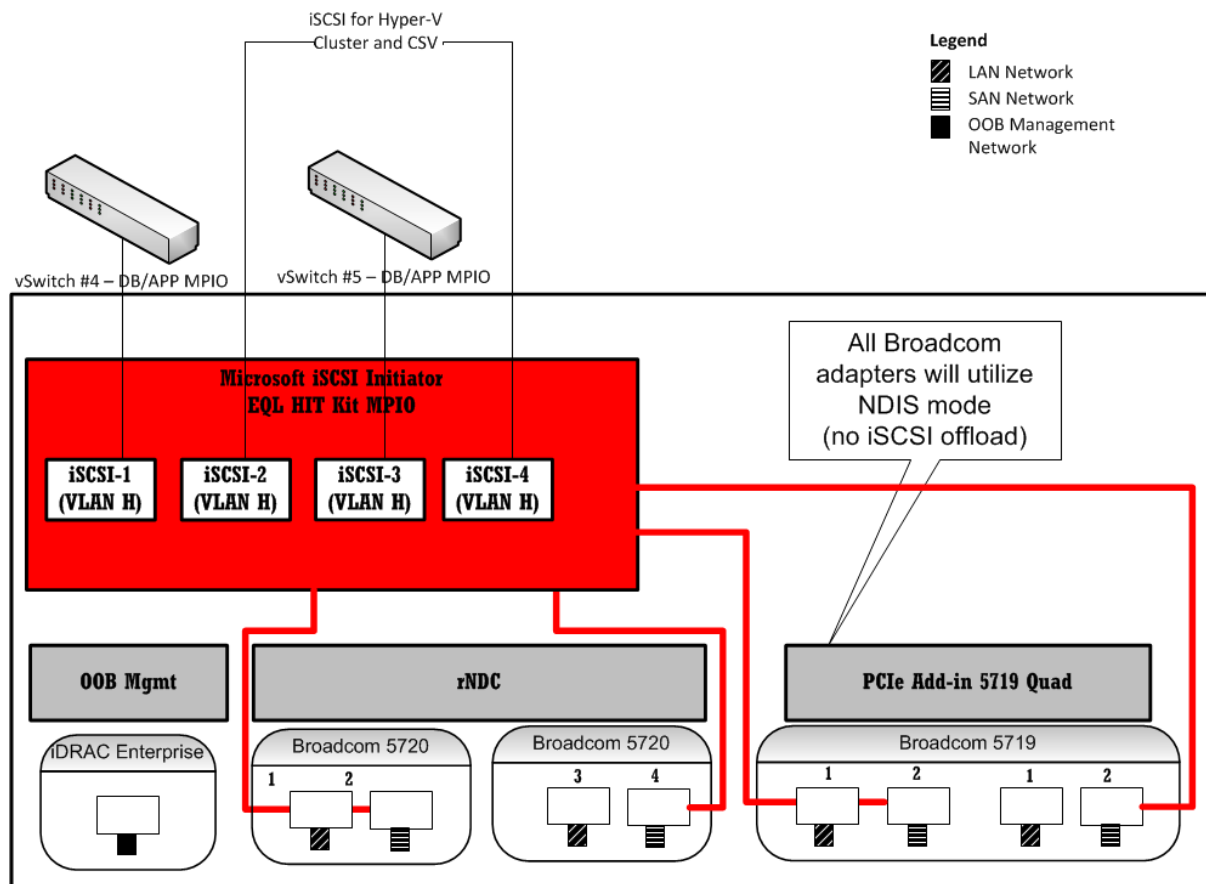
The SAN includes two PowerConnect 7048 switches that support iSCSI data traffic. The two switches were connected together with stacking modules in Ethernet mode configured as an inter-switch link (ISL) Link Aggregation Group (LAG). In addition, the solution supports up to eight 1 GB uplinks from each switch to link into an existing core iSCSI network infrastructure.

Similar to the LAN traffic, the traffic for the SAN was also segregated into its own VLAN. This facilitates isolation from the default VLAN and gives a separation between SAN traffic and any other traffic that it may come across if the SAN is uplinked to a LAN or extended to another SAN for replication.

In this reference architecture, there was only one VLAN created for iSCSI traffic. This includes both the Hyper-V CSV cluster traffic to the iSCSI storage arrays and all the SharePoint Database access traffic.

A combination of NDC and add-in NIC ports was used for the iSCSI traffic and MPIO along with EqualLogic Device Specific Module (DSM) is used for load balancing the iSCSI traffic. It also enables fault tolerance against any physical link failures at either NDC or the add-in NIC.

Figure 4 SAN Network architecture - High level overview



In this reference architecture, four physical network connections were allocated for the iSCSI SAN access on each Hyper-V cluster host. Out of the four available iSCSI connections, two were used by the Hyper-V cluster for the CSV quorum and CSV volume access. Two virtual switches were created with the remaining two iSCSI network connections. These iSCSI virtual networks were used by the SQL Database and SharePoint application servers to access the iSCSI SAN network.

The EqualLogic Host Integration Tool (HIT) kit was installed on the Hyper-V hosts, SQL Database, and Application servers' virtual machines and MPIO was used for load balancing the iSCSI traffic and failover.

The same virtual network naming and switches were implemented on all the Hyper-V hosts. This facilitates successful live migration and easier identification of virtual network elements in the farm.

SharePoint farm configuration

The SharePoint 2010 farm configuration, as shown in Figure 2 above, included two Web Front-End (WFE), two Application Servers (APP), and two database servers in a failover cluster. The application servers in the farm were used to host the search query and crawler roles. The farm servers at all tiers used teamed network connections to provide load balancing and failover capabilities.

Table 5 (below) lists the operating system and software editions used in the farm configurations.

Table 5 OS and software editions

	WFE and application servers	Database servers
Operating system	Windows Server 2008 R2 SP1 Data Center Edition	
SharePoint server	SharePoint Server 2010 Standard Edition	NA
Database server	NA	SQL Server 2008 R2 x64 Standard Edition

NOTE: Step-by-step instructions for installing and configuring a SharePoint farm and any service applications used in this performance study are outside the scope of this paper. For more information and resources, refer to the References section of this paper.

The following table shows the configuration of the virtual machines used in this reference architecture.

Table 6 Virtual Machine (VM) configuration

Virtual machine	Processor	RAM	Storage	Network
WFE and APP VMs	4 virtual processors	8GB	- OS Fixed VHD stored on iSCSI volume - APP: Search query Index on iSCSI volume	- WFE: 2x virtual networks for farm network and NLB cluster - APP: 1x virtual networks for farm network and 2x virtual network for in-guest iSCSI initiators
SQL Server DB (Failover Cluster) VMs	4 virtual processors	16GB	- OS Fixed VHD stored on iSCSI volume 4 LUNs for SQL Cluster DB using in-guest iSCSI initiators	1x virtual network for farm network 1x virtual network for SQL cluster network 2x virtual network for in-guest iSCSI

As a part of the farm deployment, EqualLogic HIT Kit was installed in the application and database virtual machines and the EqualLogic DSM for iSCSI MPIO was enabled. The default Multi-Pathing I/O

(MPIO) policy - “Least Queue Depth” - was used for load balancing the iSCSI traffic from the virtual machine to the storage arrays.

Configuration of Web Front-End (WFE) servers

This SharePoint 2010 farm design included two WFE servers. The software matrix for these WFE servers is shown in Table 5. SharePoint 2010 Standard Edition and included only out-of-the-box features used for collaboration workloads. As a part of the SharePoint collaboration workload, only the standard search service application was deployed and no other service applications, such as Excel and Visio, were deployed.

All of the WFE servers were configured in a Network Load Balancing¹⁴ (NLB) cluster. Using NLB, stateless applications such as SharePoint WFE servers are made scalable by adding additional servers when the load increases. In this reference architecture, the application server virtual machines were not a part of the NLB cluster but can be added when additional capacity at the WFE tier is desired. Redundant network connections were used at the Hyper-V host and also, the virtual switch for NLB cluster communication was created using this teamed network. Therefore, NLB was configured to use multicast mode to avoid IP address conflicts¹⁵ in the farm. To access the SharePoint NLB cluster from different IP subnets, an ARP entry for the NLB cluster name must be added on the LAN switch fabric.

Search service application configuration

SharePoint 2010 changed the search architecture and introduced high availability at the application tier; for instance, the search crawler. The new search service application architecture in SharePoint 2010 includes greater redundancy. This new design provides flexibility and lets the query and crawler roles be scaled-out separately on an as-needed basis. Search crawlers are now stateless; they do not store a copy of the index. However, the index does still propagate and is stored locally on the query servers. Two virtual machines hosting both crawler and query roles were used in the SharePoint 2010 farm.

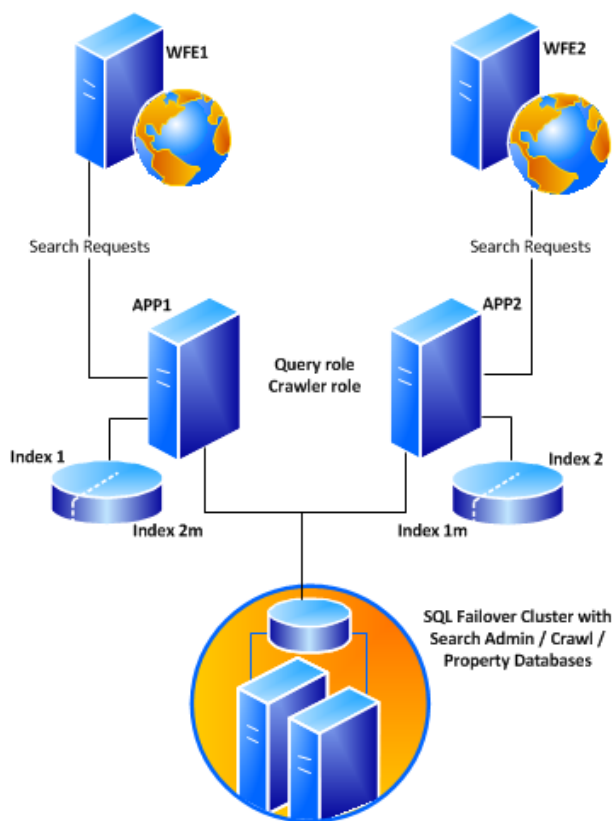
The farm configuration used the search service application configuration shown in Figure 5. The search crawler and query roles were hosted on both of the application servers to enable high availability and provide improved search performance. Both the crawlers were associated with the same crawl database, and indexed the same content source.

The search architecture shown in Figure 5 is a logical representation of how the SharePoint Search service was configured. This configuration provides complete redundancy for both search crawler and query roles.

¹⁴ NLB Deployment Guide: [http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc732855\(Ws.10\).aspx](http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc732855(Ws.10).aspx)

¹⁵ Using teamed adapters with network load balancing may cause network problems:
<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/278431>

Figure 5 Search Service Application - architecture



In Figure 5, the index partitions are represented as index 1 and index 2. The two primary index partitions were mirrored, for redundancy, and a copy (or mirror) of the index partition was placed on each application server. On both of the application servers, iSCSI initiators in guest OS were used to connect the storage volumes created on the EqualLogic Storage backend.

Network configuration

As shown in Figure 3, for the WFE servers, two virtual network connections were used. These virtual network connections were attached to the virtual switches created for farm traffic and NLB cluster communication. Besides the farm virtual network connections, as shown in Figure 4, the application servers also used virtual networks associated with the underlying virtual switch connected to the iSCSI SAN network of the vStart infrastructure. These iSCSI connections within guest OS were used to connect the application servers to the storage volumes on the EqualLogic arrays and were used to store and retrieve search query index.

The vStart network architecture design and the segregation of LAN and SAN network helps in isolating the SharePoint farm traffic from the iSCSI SAN traffic and therefore enhances the overall performance of the farm.

Configuration of the database server

As shown in Figure 2, the SharePoint 2010 farm—built atop the vStart infrastructure—deployed two virtual machines as the database servers. Two database servers were deployed in a highly available SQL failover cluster, with redundant data paths at the database tier of the SharePoint farm. These

database virtual machines were also made a part of the Hyper-V failover cluster to provide physical host level high availability. This combination ensures faster database failover times using SQL failover cluster capabilities and provides a second level of high availability using Hyper-V failover clustering.

A SharePoint farm's performance depends on the performance of the database server and the database storage backend. In this reference architecture, as the storage resources on the host server hosting the virtual machine were limited, the SQL instance was connected directly to an external EqualLogic iSCSI storage array. In this virtualized configuration of the SharePoint farm, one EqualLogic PS6100X storage array was used to provide sufficient storage capacity and I/O bandwidth to the SQL database contents. This array provides 24x 600GB 10K RPM SAS drives configured in a RAID 10 for storing the SharePoint content.

The following table shows how the storage pool was used to host the SharePoint content and other databases.

Table 7 SharePoint database volumes

Database	LUN size
SharePoint Content Database	2TB
SharePoint Content Logs	200GB
SharePoint Search DB (Crawl, Admin, and Property)	300GB
WSS Usage Database	500GB
Other SharePoint Databases (Config and AdminContent)	100GB
Temp Database	200GB
Search Query Index1	200GB
Search Query Index2	200GB
Search Query Mirror1	200GB
Search Query Mirror2	200GB

Memory configuration

By default, SQL Server service uses all available memory¹⁶ because SQL Server dynamically grows and shrinks the size of the buffer pool depending on the physical memory reported by the operating system. However, this behavior can be adjusted to limit the amount of physical memory used by SQL Server. Within the scope of this paper, SQL Server memory was limited to 80 percent of the memory available in the VM container. For example, on the virtual clustered SQL database server, out of 16GB of memory in the VM container, 12.8GB was allocated to SQL Server.

Network configuration

Similar to the WFE and application tiers, the database tier also used teamed network connections for the farm network as shown in Figure 3. For the iSCSI storage network, two virtual network connections were used for the in-guest iSCSI initiators, and MPIO was configured to provide load balancing and failover capability.

¹⁶ SQL Server memory options - <http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms178067.aspx>

Key considerations

Leveraging vStart virtualized infrastructure solution for deploying SharePoint Server 2010 farm significantly reduces the time required to plan for the infrastructure and increases the time-to-value. vStart solutions are pre-designed, pre-built, and pre-tested and architected for high availability of all infrastructure elements and hence provides high availability of farm roles within the SharePoint 2010 farm.

In this reference architecture, dual redundancy for SQL service and DB virtual machines was achieved by configuring SQL failover cluster among the SQL database servers and also including the database virtual machines as a part of the Hyper-V failover cluster. This enables faster SQL service failover time—as small as 15 seconds—using guest failover clustering of the SQL virtual machines and a SQL virtual machine failover of approximately 60 seconds during unplanned down time. The live migration of an active SQL virtual machine can also be done for any planned downtime of the Hyper-V nodes without any perceived downtime of the SQL service.

The SharePoint 2010 virtualized farm in this reference architecture was validated—using the Dell SharePoint Load Generation framework¹⁷ and SharePoint collaboration usage profile—for up to 35000 users with 10% concurrency with a farm response time of 0.1 seconds and 285 requests per seconds. The processor usage on the SharePoint WFE servers was at an optimal level (approximately 75 percent) and 45 percent on the active database virtual machine.

NOTE: The farm performance discussed here is relative to the usage profile used in the lab testing. The performance may differ based on the workload profile and content database size.

The SharePoint farm design in this reference architecture used only two WFE servers in NLB cluster. However, the application server virtual machines can also be added to the NLB cluster when a higher user load capacity is desired and/or the load on WFE servers need to be reduced.

Using SQL server service in a virtual machine is not recommended when the database load is high. This reference architecture—by deploying SQL server as a virtual machine—may not scale beyond 4000 concurrent users or with higher SharePoint content database size.

Summary

A SharePoint 2010 farm consists of multiple servers, each provisioned with different SharePoint components. There are several design and best practices to consider while building the infrastructure for a SharePoint farm. These design considerations includes aspects such as high availability of all SharePoint farm roles, service application architecture considerations, and storage and networking best practices.

The Dell vStart virtualized infrastructure has been designed to reduce the time-to-value and enable rapid application deployment. Leveraging this infrastructure for deploying SharePoint farm derives several benefits. This includes rapid time-to-value for SharePoint application, high availability at all

¹⁷ How Dell does SharePoint load testing?
<http://en.community.dell.com/techcenter/b/techcenter/archive/2010/08/16/how-dell-does-microsoft-sharepoint-load-testing.aspx>

tiers of the SharePoint farm, infrastructure capacity that can accommodate any future needs of a SharePoint farm, and of course, a virtualized infrastructure that is pre-designed, pre-validated, and pre-built with several networking and storage best practices.

References

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