

ADVANTAGE

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS FOR SERIOUS COMPETITORS



Who Is eGroup?

eGroup combines unmatched technical skills, strategic partnerships and a collaborative approach to help customers optimize their IT infrastructures.

At a time when many technology providers are struggling to stay even, eGroup continues to enjoy strong growth. The firm was recently honored at the Charleston Regional Business Journal's annual "Roaring 20" event as the region's fourth fastest-growing company, in front of a sold-out crowd of business and community leaders. Spurring this growth is

eGroup's continued geographic expansion throughout the Carolinas, building upon the same proven approach that began in Charleston. As of January 2009, eGroup has a dedicated presence in Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, Myrtle Beach and Charlotte, NC.

Carolinas Sales Manager Chris Hogan attributes this success to eGroup's thoughtful approach to both business and technology. eGroup has built its reputation by establishing strong collaborative relationships with its customers as well as delivering leading expertise in key business-enabling technologies.

"If I had to sum up what eGroup does in a simple term, I would say it's IT infrastructure optimization. To eGroup, that means virtualization, enterprise storage, Microsoft infrastructure solutions and network communication archi-

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EGROUP ADVANTAGE

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Who Is eGroup?

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tures,” Hogan said. “Expertise in those four core competencies allows us to design IT infrastructures that enable a business’s success rather than limiting what it can do.

“We work with organizations’ top executives to understand their vision and true business needs so that we can translate that into the technical aspects of the data center, and ensure that their IT infrastructure will be always available, secure, provide flexible access to data, and scale with the growth of the business. For that reason, our sales reps and engineers understand not only technology, but more importantly how the work they’re doing helps support the overall mission of a company.”

Strong Partnerships

Server virtualization has been a core focus of eGroup for more than five years. eGroup was one of the first VMware partners in South Carolina and still is one of the few VMware Authorized Consulting Partners in the Carolinas, a title conveying the highest

levels of VMware Services expertise. The firm is also a Citrix Gold Partner — their #1 reseller in the region for two of the past three years — and has strong expertise in the Citrix XenServer product.

“Server virtualization optimizes your environment in several important ways, from management, to power and cooling efficiencies, to reduced hardware requirements

and the ability to scale rapidly and efficiently. It does that by greatly reducing the need for server hardware that is almost always underutilized,” said Hogan. “We can install software in a customer’s server environment and analyze key performance data to determine which servers are good candidates for virtualization. Most of them are — very seldom do we see a server environment that averages higher than 10 percent utilization. We can then design a virtual infrastructure that will exceed the customer’s performance requirements while consolidating their hardware footprint and providing a remarkably fast ROI.”

eGroup also specializes in state-of-the-art enterprise storage solutions that provide the performance necessary for primary transactional data as well as highly efficient backup, recovery and archival. EMC,

eGroup’s go-to partner for storage, continues to build upon its mature enterprise storage product lines with energy-efficient technologies that reduce power and cooling requirements.

“And because EMC is the majority stakeholder in VMware, its enterprise storage systems are built to leverage everything VMware can do. It’s been a tremendous partnership that underscores most of the enterprise storage and virtualization projects we do,” Hogan said. “It also dovetails beautifully with our ‘green IT’ focus — we’ve been green for many years out of concern for the energy resources consumed by IT environments. We want to work with technology providers like VMware and EMC that share that commitment.”

Key Certifications

eGroup also brings customers strong expertise in optimizing data storage. According to Hogan, many customers have large amounts of static or rarely accessed data on primary storage systems that are expensive, built for speed and backed up daily. Moving that data to less expensive, high-capacity storage, or an archive solution applies strategy to the situation, saves money, and streamlines backup and recovery processes.

“It doesn’t matter how fast you back something up — it’s how fast you recover if you have a failure. So it’s important to make sure that your Tier One storage is dedicated to your primary transactional data that’s constantly changing,” said Hogan. “Data that’s seldom changed can move to lower-cost Tier Two, while rarely accessed data moves to an archive, or Tier Three. Backup strategies then follow this model. That way, you’re not spending gobs of time and money backing up data that you’ve already backed up countless times. Combined with the data replication and de-duplication technologies we use, we provide our customers with exactly what they need to be supremely confident in the scalability and security of their data platforms.”

eGroup is an EMC Authorized Services Network Partner, which means eGroup engineers are fully authorized to conduct professional services engagements on behalf of EMC. eGroup also frequently performs various types of storage system assessments by installing software that provides perspective into every characteristic of the data in the client’s environ-

For a variety of technology updates, tips, tricks, and other interesting tidbits, eGroup invites you to check out our new blog:
<http://blogs.egroup-us.com/>

ment. This insight allows eGroup to design optimal systems.

To maintain its Microsoft Gold partner designation, eGroup must regularly provide customer references that exhibit successful projects in clustering, Active Directory, Exchange and other Microsoft infrastructure disciplines. eGroup is also a Cisco partner with CCNA or higher certifications throughout its engineering team.

Engineering Focus

eGroup has developed a four-phase methodology that encompasses consultation, design, deployment and support. Each phase incorporates industry best practices along with the real-world experience of eGroup's engineers.

"We can handle any project from start to finish or take on just those components that the customer needs help with," said Hogan. "Whatever the scope of the engagement, our goal is to be indispensable to our customers in terms of the information we provide. We are dedicated to knowledge transfer so that when we walk away, the customer is able to manage their systems efficiently."

While the right technical skills are essential, eGroup also takes the time to recruit engineers and account managers who are professional, personable and able to effectively collaborate with customers.

"We're very keen on making sure that our engineers can build a rapport with our customers. At the end of the day we're a services company and these are the folks who are interacting with customers every day," Hogan said.

How does a technology company continue to grow when others are facing difficult times? For eGroup, the answer lies in strong engineering skills, uncommon vision, a keen eye for technologies that are truly valuable, and a collaborative approach to customer relationships.



WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT EGROUP

"eGroup has provided tremendous benefits to our IT Department here at Conway Medical Center, from our planned strategies of virtualization to our data center and disaster recovery planning."

— MICKEY WATERS, CIO, CONWAY MEDICAL CENTER

"Quite simply these guys understand complex technology in a manner that is comforting. I have complete confidence in their ability to implement the right technology that will deliver on the strategic goals we have outlined."

— NOLAN HENNESSEE, CIO, LEXINGTON MEDICAL CENTER

"From consultation to design to deployment to support, I know our organization is in excellent hands with eGroup."

— MICHAEL BRANNEN, DIRECTOR OF IT, PIEDMONT HEALTHCARE

"Being a small IT shop presents many challenges. For several years now, we've used the expertise of eGroup to augment our in-house capabilities. We've found them to be extremely competent. One of our recent projects was to develop a long range strategic IT plan, and eGroup helped us assess our current infrastructure and gave us the guidance we needed to develop a long-range plan we can be confident in."

— MIKE WITTE, CIO, LUTHERAN HOMES

"We chose eGroup simply because they are the best at what they do."

— DOUG CAMBURN, DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY,
RICHARDSON, PATRICK, WESTBROOK & BRICKMAN

"We needed more than just a systems integrator — we needed a technology-savvy business partner that we could establish a sole-source, on-going relationship with to meet our current and future business needs. With eGroup, we immediately gained a high degree of comfort that they possessed the business competency and the enterprise technical expertise required to elevate our IT infrastructure to the next level."

— MIKE FOWLER, PRESIDENT, ROGERS & BROWN CUSTOM BROKERS

"We chose eGroup for their technical experience and because they had a sincere appreciation for our needs. Since converting to the new system, about 95% of our technical problems have vanished. Our down-time has basically disappeared, leaving remarkable improvement in our operating efficiency. In addition to the peace of mind we have knowing our system will cooperate, the amount of money spent on support issues and emergency service calls will be minimal.

"eGroup has once again helped put Dunes Properties in an ideal position for optimal productivity and business continuity," ... "Thank you so much for supporting us. I hope you realize you have been the biggest contributor to our success over the years. I look forward to our future as business partners."

— NINA MCCURDY, CFO, DUNES PROPERTIES OF CHARLESTON



Minimize Risk

With virtualization and automation, VMware helps take the adventure out of disaster recovery planning.

His numerous exploits included the first successful expedition to the South Pole and the first trans-Arctic flight across the North Pole, yet legendary Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen did not think of himself as an “adventurer.”

“Adventure is just bad planning,” he once said.

Biographers say Amundsen was well-regarded among his peers for his ability to minimize risk through meticulous preparation, exceptional organizational skills and innovative survival techniques. Mike Carter, eGroup principal consultant, says these are the same qualities businesses should draw upon to ensure that a disaster doesn’t turn operations into an adventure.

“It’s crucial that organizations

incorporate a comprehensive, proven disaster recovery plan into their overall business strategy to help ensure the recovery of data and applications with the least amount of impact to operations,” said Carter. “Virtualization technology can dramatically minimize risk by automating the disaster recovery process and ensuring that it is executed rapidly, correctly and cost-efficiently.”

Keeping it Simple

VMware’s virtualization platform makes significant improvements to disaster recovery readiness by creating hardware independence. In a non-virtualized environment, data replication must occur between like equipment. By abstracting the operating system from the hardware layer, VMware allows organizations to replicate asymmetri-

cally — that is, without having to provide a matching host or disk at the disaster recovery site.

“With virtualization, you don’t have to worry about matching your hardware configuration, and you eliminate the difficulties of recovering your operating system and application installation on different hardware,” said Carter. “Virtualization turns everything into data stored in just a few files on disk. Protecting a complete system is just a matter of protecting a few files using your backup or replication software. The files that make up a virtual machine can be recovered to any hardware without requiring any changes because virtual machines are hardware independent.”

Traditional disaster recovery in a non-virtualized environment also requires many manual, complex steps to allocate recovery resources, perform operating system, application and data recovery, and validate that systems are ready for use. These manual processes leave organizations exposed to significant risk of extended downtime because they are tough to set up, time-consuming to maintain and extremely difficult to test. As a result, only a subset of important systems can be adequately protected.

VMware has addressed those issues with the introduction of Site Recovery Manager (SRM), a workflow engine that automates disaster recovery processes. SRM works seamlessly with VMware Infrastructure and VMware VirtualCenter, and is tightly integrated with storage replication software from leading storage vendors. As a result, SRM can guide users through the process of connecting to the disaster recovery site and to just about any storage replication software in use, and makes it easy to map production resources to the corresponding resources at a recovery site.

SRM also provides an intuitive interface to help customers create recovery plans for different failover scenarios and different parts of their infrastructure. Organizations can spec-

eGroup Certified as 'Go-To' Partner for VMware Site Recovery Manager

Following completion of a rigorous training program, eGroup has been awarded certification in VMware's prestigious Site Recovery Manager (SRM) Partner Program.

VMware Site Recovery Manager is part of VMware's industry-leading suite of management and automation products for the datacenter. VMware SRM delivers advanced capabilities for disaster recovery management, non-disruptive testing and automated failover. SRM can manage failover from production datacenters to disaster recovery sites, as well as failover between two sites with active workloads. It can also help with planned

datacenter failovers such as datacenter migrations.

After being hand-selected by VMware for the exclusive SRM Partner training track, eGroup was required to meet demanding training objectives, including building its own internal interoperability lab with a variety of storage and replication mechanisms.

The SRM Partner program underscores eGroup's commitment to work with market players that are shaping the technology landscape. One of the key benefits of participation in the program is technical excellence through early access to concentrated

VMware SRM content to be used in developing customer-focused SRM solutions.

"Being selected for, and graduating from, the VMware SRM Partner Program is a huge recognition of the confidence that VMware and its partners have in eGroup and its delivery capabilities. As computing resources move to a cloud or grid format, you can expect that eGroup will deliver high-value, high-touch services to those customers adopting a cloud computing operating model," said Michael Carter, Principal with eGroup.

ify virtual machines to be suspended or shut down to free resources for recovery. They can also specify the order in which virtual machines are powered on, set user-defined scripts to execute automatically, and determine where to pause the recovery process if necessary.

Testing, Testing

Having a recovery plan is an important step, but just as important is ensuring that the plan is reliable. Traditional recovery plans are often unreliable because they are hard to test, difficult to keep up to date, and depend upon correct execution of complex manual recovery processes. In a recent survey of more than 1,000 IT managers, nearly one-third reported that their tests failed to meet recovery time objectives. Human error was the leading reported cause of failure. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents said they are reluctant to test their plans due to disruption to the business and lack of resources.

SRM greatly simplifies and improves the testing process. It automates the creation of a non-disruptive and isolated testing environment on the recovery site by leveraging the snapshot capabilities of storage arrays and connecting virtual machines to the user's isolated testing network. It automates the execution of the recovery plan to be used in an actual failover and cleans up the testing environment once testing is complete. Test results are saved for viewing and export at any time. Hardware configuration dependencies are eliminated and testing can occur without impacting production systems.

"Effective disaster recovery has been a significant chal-

lenge for many organizations," said Carter. "By eliminating the error-prone manual steps in the typical recovery process, VMware removes the most common causes of failure during recovery and ensures that recovery procedures will be consistently executed as intended."

A spirit of adventure can lead to innovation in the business world, but when it comes to disaster planning, there is no place for uncertainty or risk. A disaster recovery solution must be as clear and predictable as possible because there is little room for error when mission-critical data and applications are at stake. VMware's portfolio of virtualization solutions helps take the guesswork out of disaster recovery through hardware independence and automation. It's a solution organizations should explore.

eGroup Advantage

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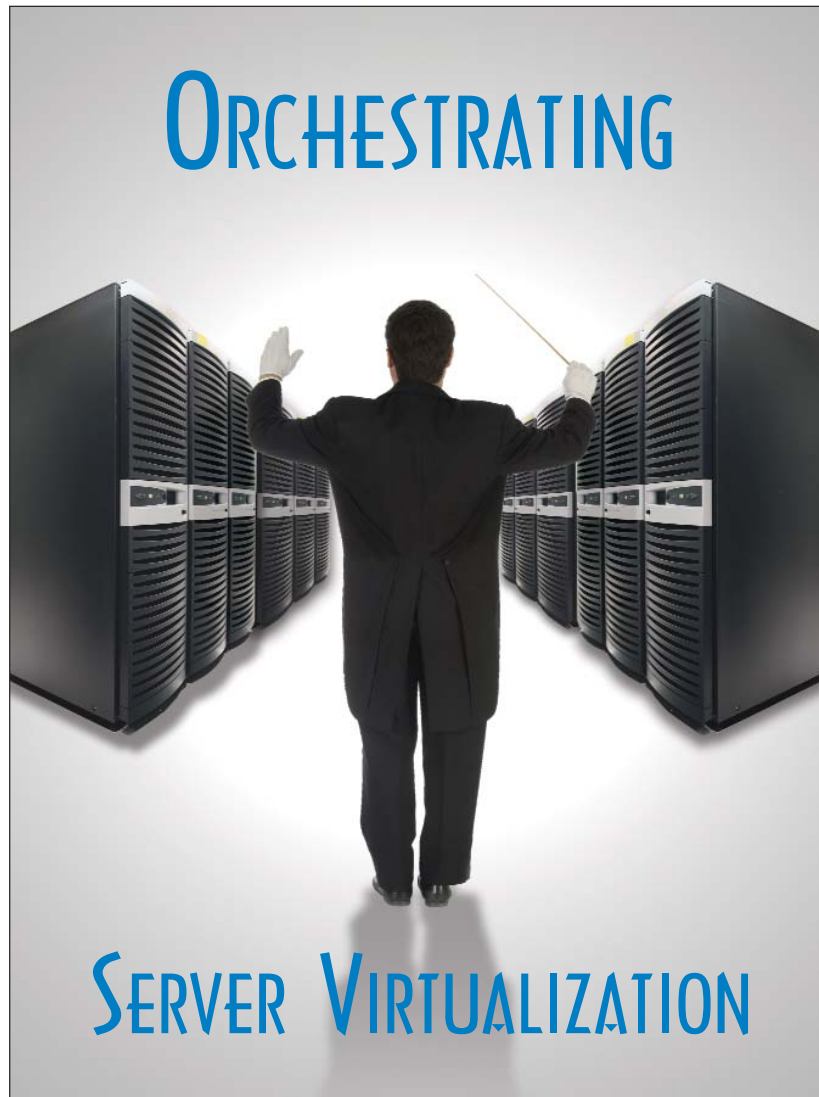
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ORCHESTRATING

SERVER VIRTUALIZATION

*Careful planning
is the key
to minimizing
challenges and
achieving remarkable
business benefits.*

Server virtualization has rapidly become a mainstream technology with easily identifiable benefits such as improved server utilization, reduced hardware and management costs, reduced IT footprint, lower power and cooling consumption, and improved disaster recovery/business continuity (DR/BC) practices. It is now routinely viewed as a cornerstone of the automated, dynamic data center of tomorrow.

It is easy to make a business case for the technology, particularly in the current economic environment. A recent IDC study concludes that the average company deploying basic virtualization could see an ROI of 472 percent and payback in less than a year, including deployment time. Beyond reducing hardware and software costs, IDC notes that virtualization improves IT staff efficiency and end-user productivity, reduces downtime and speeds the performance of business applications.

“Customers view virtualization as both a strategic investment and a proven way to reduce costs,” said Tod Nielsen, chief operating officer at VMware. “Customers understand that virtualization is about much more than just consolidation. It’s about manageability, flexibility and being smart about how they run their businesses.”

Be Prepared

However, Gene Ruth, research analyst for Burton Group, notes that there are challenges in shifting from an existing physical server environment to a virtualized one — particularly if organizations fail to plan properly and set realistic expectations.

“Server virtualization is a transformative technology, but it has the potential to add to the operational complexity and risk by using unfamiliar technology and requiring disparate operational procedures and architectures,” said Ruth.

While virtualization delivers extraordinary ROI, organizations must be prepared to incur some up-front costs. They may need to upgrade aging equipment to gain the long-term benefits of virtualization, and there will be assorted expenses for virtualization licenses and management software. Even the so-called “free” hypervisors aren’t truly free — they lack the management tools and management interfaces required to perform essential tasks such as dynamic provisioning, live migration and resource pooling.

Robust management features are essential to effective server virtualization. The ease with which virtual machines (VMs) can be generated and deployed creates the risk of uncontrolled proliferation resulting in wasted resources and additional IT burdens. That can be avoided with a high-quality orchestration platform that allows automation of the entire VM lifecycle from requisition to de-commissioning.

Moving Forward

These challenges don’t need to be deal-breakers, however. Organizations that have a realistic view of the potential challenges and pitfalls, exercise caution, plan properly and develop a clear strategy can realistically expect to craft an infrastructure that makes exceptionally efficient use of hardware and network assets while also simplifying or automating many of today’s administrative tasks. To help ensure a successful implementation:

SET GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS: Document as clearly as possible the desired objectives, such as reducing server sprawl, maximizing utilization, expanding the development environment or improving disaster recovery. Research and understand the challenges created in a vir-

tualized environment and prepare for them. Establish a long-term perspective in which virtualization is just the first step in a multi-year data center transformation process that includes retiring hardware that is no longer needed.

OBTAIN BUY-IN: Solicit input from key stakeholders, including storage, networking, information security, facilities managers, application developers and end-users. It is critical to demonstrate that virtualization can be accomplished without hindering applications performance and without diminishing service to end-users.

ASSESS THE CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE: Identify all the existing physical servers and document their current CPU, memory, capacity and utilization levels to identify which servers could and should be consolidated. Determine if there are common applications running on a number of different servers. Consider whether the number of applications is increasing and if the capacity required for those applications is likely to continue expanding.

UNDERSTAND LICENSING IMPLICATIONS: Sometimes, the original licensing terms and conditions can change once an application has been migrated to the virtualized environment. In some cases, independent software vendors require additional licenses for each instance of a virtual machine running on one physical server.

CHOOSE WISELY: When choosing a platform, think “value” rather than “price.” When evaluating products, check costs based on a per-socket basis, and don’t forget to check the availability and cost of essential features such as migration, load balancing, recovery, snapshot support and backup management. If internal IT staff is limited, deployment features and ease of use will be particularly important attributes.

“As more enterprises begin to move virtualization into production environments, they will experience challenges beyond managing physical and virtual resources,” said Noemi Greyzdorf, IDC Research Manager. “In order to reap the benefits of server virtualization and drive down capital costs, enterprises need solutions (that) manage the overall architecture, storage resources and operational processes to reduce complexity and increase efficiencies in managing physical and virtual environments.”

Server virtualization is not without challenges, but with proper planning it can address many of the IT challenges that have been intensified by the current economy. It allows organizations to quickly adapt to change, capitalize on new opportunities and achieve greater business alignment while controlling costs. With that type of value proposition, it’s not a question of “if” but “how” server virtualization should be implemented.

PLAN RESPONSIBLY. WORK FEARLESSLY.

Consultation. Design. Implementation. Support.

eGroup delivers solutions designed to help serious competitors continue operations with minimal disruption or downtime in the event of a natural or intentional disaster. You are your disaster plan. Need a competitive advantage? Call us.

● BUSINESS CONTINUITY & DISASTER RECOVERY SOLUTIONS

● DATA REPLICATION & CO-LOCATION SERVICES

● SERVER VIRTUALIZATION & CONSOLIDATION SOLUTIONS

"I know that a lot of planning and hard work has gone into helping Rogers & Brown reach this state of readiness with our Disaster Plan. It is my belief that this puts us among the elite when it comes to having the ability to operate and remain a viable, functioning business in the event of a disaster."

— Mike Fowler, President of Rogers & Brown Custom Brokers



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