



NetApp®

Success Story

Plex Systems Delivers World-Class Manufacturing ERP Cloud on NetApp Storage



Another NetApp solution delivered by:

FUSIONSTORM.
IT Delivered



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry

Manufacturing software

The Challenge

Maintain a cost-effective, world-class data center to deliver highly competitive manufacturing ERP cloud services.

The Solution

Deliver Plex Online ERP SaaS offerings on NetApp® FAS6280 storage systems with OnCommand® management software plus Flash Cache™ intelligent caching to enhance performance.

Benefits

- Averted \$2.7 million in upfront investment while enabling leading-edge storage solution for its SaaS cloud
- Decreased RPOs and RTOs from 24 to 2 hours
- Reduced storage space as much as 75% with NetApp storage efficiency technologies such as deduplication

Customer Profile

Plex Systems, Inc., is the developer of Plex Online, a software-as-a-service (SaaS) enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution for manufacturing companies. Plex Online offers industry-leading features for virtually every department within a manufacturing company. The company's software solutions support shop floor, procurement, finance and management, sales processes, and other operations. Founded in 1995, Plex Systems is headquartered in Auburn Hills, Michigan, with hundreds of customers around the globe.

The Challenge

Maintaining a five-star data center

Today, thousands of users rely on the Plex Online cloud ERP to help them drive operational excellence and business success. Through its SaaS ERP solutions and the intelligent use of technology, Plex Systems empowers manufacturing companies to increase efficiencies, significantly reduce costs, improve product quality, and enhance productivity from the shop floor to the top floor. Plex Systems also helps manufacturing organizations leverage the Plex Online SaaS model to further their environmental sustainability missions.

To deliver its competitive manufacturing ERP cloud services, Plex Systems invests in a state-of-the-art data center that its customers can take advantage of at a fraction of the cost of operating their own. To maintain its advanced data center and respond to market demands, the company frequently upgrades and enhances components of the IT infrastructure to provide continued delivery of superior cloud ERP services to its customers.

"Customer expectations continue to rise in the competitive cloud services market," says Drew Flint, director of Infrastructure at Plex Systems. "Manufacturing companies demand robust disaster recovery practices that ensure that their mission-critical data is safe and system availability and performance are maximized." The company wanted to move to a more advanced storage solution with the capabilities to reduce recovery time objectives (RTOs) and recovery point objectives (RPOs) to support a more stringent business continuity strategy for its customers.

Running a lean IT team, Plex Systems required that the new storage solution operate consistently across all storage

“NetApp backup and recovery capabilities, plus the high performance and availability of the NetApp FAS systems, help improve our competitive edge and support us in meeting the intensive business demands of the manufacturing companies we serve. No other cloud service provider in our market has committed to our level of disaster recovery, and NetApp helps make that possible.”

Drew Flint

Director of Infrastructure, Plex Systems, Inc.

systems in both primary and secondary data centers and provide storage automation at every turn to increase management efficiency and reduce risk. Also important, the company wanted a storage technology path that would cost-effectively provide the best possible solution year after year.

The Solution

Providing the foundation for Plex Online SaaS

Working closely with FusionStorm, an IT consulting and technology services provider and participant in the NetApp Partner Program, Plex Systems deployed NetApp FAS6280 storage systems in its primary data center for delivering its cloud ERP services. The company chose the enterprise-class storage system for its high performance, high availability, and petabyte scale. Plex Systems finances its NetApp storage systems through NetApp Capital Solutions, which enables the company to invest in the right storage solution for its world-class data center with a flexible, affordable upgrade path to continually improve the infrastructure.

“NetApp Capital Solutions understands our industry and our growth strategy,” says Michael Twarozynski, chief financial officer at Plex Systems. “By financing our storage infrastructure, we are able

to upgrade our data center with regular consistency to maintain our state-of-the-art service offerings.”

NetApp provides the foundation for Plex Online SaaS solutions that include manufacturing execution systems and quality management systems for the shop floor, supply chain management systems for procurement, ERP systems for finance and management, and customer relationship management systems for the sales process. Plex Systems uses advanced NetApp backup and recovery capabilities including Snapshot™ and SnapRestore® technologies. A Snapshot copy of the test tier data is refreshed every 24 hours, and the report server is refreshed every 4 hours and stored locally on the NetApp FAS3270 storage systems. The production data that is replicated to the FAS6070 storage systems in the disaster recovery data center using NetApp SnapMirror® technology is never more than two hours old, and the data that is backed up to disk is sent twice daily using NetApp SnapVault® technology. The redundant, geographically distant data centers safely and securely protect Plex Online data. The company tests its comprehensive disaster recovery plan on a quarterly basis to meet rigid SSAE 16 requirements for service organizations and to provide maximum system availability for customers.

“No other cloud service provider in our market has committed to our level of disaster recovery,” says Flint. “NetApp Snapshot, SnapRestore, and SnapMirror technologies have enabled us to decrease our recovery point and recovery time objectives from 24 to 2 hours, which greatly reduces IT staff time and elevates the service we provide our customers. These backup and recovery capabilities, plus the high performance and availability of the NetApp FAS systems, help improve our competitive edge and support us in meeting the intensive business demands of the manufacturing companies we serve.”

NetApp supports the company’s Microsoft® SQL Server® 2008, VMware® vSphere® 5.0, and in-house document control system workloads. In addition, Plex Systems runs its Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 application on NetApp for delivery of its e-mail hosting and administration service. The company protects the environment using SnapManager® for Microsoft Exchange Server.

The IT staff leverages the latest management technologies in the data center control room, including OnCommand® Operations Manager, to automatically monitor the storage area network (SAN) via SNMP and

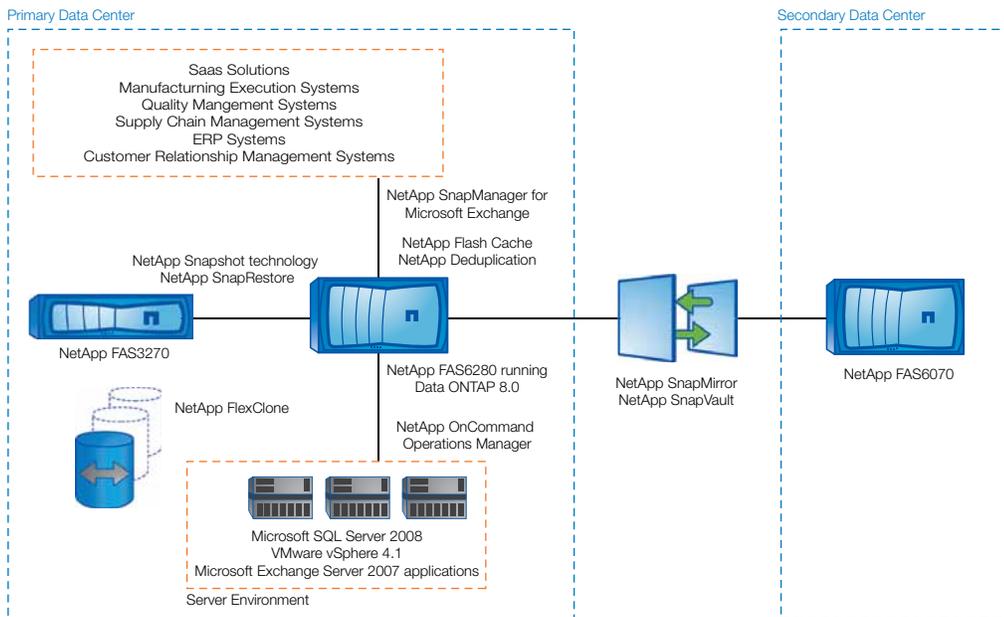


Figure 1) Plex Systems deployed NetApp FAS6280 storage systems in its primary data center for delivering its cloud ERP services. The company chose the enterprise-class storage system for its high performance, high availability, and petabyte scale.

provide alerts and reports that help align the storage infrastructure with the company’s business requirements. OnCommand System Manager enables administrators to set up and manage NetApp storage aggregates, volumes, LUNs, and more.

Plex Systems optimizes storage efficiency and performance using NetApp Flash Cache, which serves as a Virtual Storage Tier, providing real-time assessment of workload-based priorities and optimizing I/O data requests for cost and performance. “NetApp Flash Cache allows us to get more performance out of fewer disks, which reduces disk stress,” notes Flint. The Virtual Storage Tier combines NetApp efficiency technologies and intelligent caching to achieve performance gains.

The company also leverages NetApp efficiency solutions, including NetApp deduplication and thin provisioning, to optimize its storage environment and streamline storage management, which is vital to accommodating 100% annual data growth in recent years. NetApp unified architecture, which enables multiprotocol support, allows Plex Systems to leverage advanced Fibre Channel connectivity to transport network data from its servers to the NetApp SAN.

Business Benefits Driving high availability and competitive advantage

The FAS6280 storage system provides enterprise-class availability, helping Plex Services meet its service-level agreements. Combined with NetApp backup and recovery technologies and monitoring capabilities, NetApp storage helps Plex Systems deliver the uninterrupted online ERP applications that help companies maintain operations hour after hour.

“Our customers depend on our Plex Online ERP services for real-time decision making and quality control, and to help keep manufacturing processes moving,” says Flint. “Customers want to know that their systems and data will be safe, secure, and available, and NetApp helps us deliver a disaster recovery plan that our customers trust in. Most important, NetApp supports us in consistently providing the mission-critical systems that our customers rely on day in and day out—from shop floor control and production scheduling to part specifications and accounting.”

Enabling storage efficiency and environmental sustainability

With its SaaS ERP offerings delivered on NetApp storage, Plex Systems helps manufacturers contribute to environmental sustainability by reducing energy

consumption, paper and print supply usage, and carbon emissions from commuting. Advanced NetApp storage management software helps Plex Systems reduce its storage footprint and streamline management of its storage platform and nearly 400TB of data.

NetApp offers Plex Systems important capabilities for automating and simplifying complex, typically manual and time-consuming processes for provisioning, backup, restoration, recovery, and cloning of physical or virtual systems. NetApp deduplication alone reduces Plex Systems’ storage space by 30% to 75% in its VMware, document control system, and other environments. FlexClone® technology allows the service provider’s Microsoft SQL Server databases to be cloned six times a day while the test database is cloned once a day, in a fraction of the time it took from previous updates.

“We are very, very big on automation and know that it’s crucial to enabling our cloud-based services and to delivering them cost-effectively,” says Flint. “The NetApp unified storage platform, storage management capabilities, and software integration have enabled us to double our terabytes-to-full-time-employee ratio over a three-year period.”

“NetApp Capital Solutions helps us deliver our services from a world-class data center while freeing up budget to invest in marketing and sales activities that help our company grow.”

Michael T. Twarozynski

Chief Financial Officer, Plex Systems, Inc.

For Plex Systems, its investment in efficient, high-availability NetApp storage, financed through NetApp Capital Solutions, allowed the company to avert \$2.7 million in upfront storage costs while maintaining an advanced data center capable of responding to today's and tomorrow's market demands. By leveraging both a technically sound and financially seamless strategy, Plex Systems is positioned to increase efficiencies, significantly reduce costs, improve product quality, and enhance productivity for years to come.

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

NetApp Products

NetApp FAS6280, FAS6070, FAS3270, and FAS3240 storage systems

Data ONTAP® 8.0 operating system

OnCommand System Manager

OnCommand Operations Manager

FlexClone

Flash Cache

Snapshot technology

SnapRestore

SnapMirror

SnapVault

SnapManager for Microsoft

Exchange

Thin provisioning

Deduplication

Protocols

NFS

Fibre Channel

Third-Party Products

Microsoft Exchange Server 2007

Microsoft SQL Server 2008

VMware vSphere 5.0

Partner

FusionStorm

www.fusionstorm.com



www.netapp.com

NetApp creates innovative storage and data management solutions that deliver outstanding cost efficiency and accelerate business breakthroughs. Discover our passion for helping companies around the world go further, faster at www.netapp.com.

Go further, faster®

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