

Getting the Upper Hand on Server Consolidation - IO



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Virtualization leads to server consolidation and cost savings. At least that's how the process is supposed to play out. But anticipated financial and operational benefits can quickly vanish when server consolidation plans go awry.

To gain the upper hand on server consolidation, and ensure that your virtualization strategy reaches its maximum potential, pay attention to these details:

Create a detailed plan. Careful planning is the key to successful server consolidation. Identify, in writing, the project's performance, size, cost and performance goals. Create a detailed schedule with specific benchmarks for key events. Build bridges with key management players to ensure adequate buy-in and support.

Look toward future needs. Your consolidated server environment will function as your data center's foundation for many years, so you need to look forward as you develop your strategy. Examine current business and technology trends to estimate your server needs. Also think about your data center's location. To achieve maximum cost and operational efficiency, you need to place your infrastructure in a setting that will allow you to cost effectively scale your physical server pool in step with financial and technological changes.

Build in resource redundancy. Fewer physical servers means a greater reliance on power, cooling, security and other vital support systems. Since losing even one machine can seriously impact data center operations, make sure that your physical environment is supported by resilient, continuously available and efficient support resources.

Set a reasonable physical-to-virtual consolidation ratio. Many managers launch consolidation projects with unreasonable expectations and a whole lot

of wishful thinking. Set aside vendor claims and create your own physical-to-virtual consolidation ratio. Whether you calculate this figure this yourself or pay a consultant to create an estimate, an accurate ratio will prevent you from buying too many physical servers or deploying a server environment that's insufficient for your ongoing needs.

Understand the technology. Many enterprises approach server virtualization—and consolidation—without fully understanding the underlying technology. Before launching your project, take some time to analyze various virtualization approaches and their effect on server consolidation. Also take a close look at your existing data center and analyze its long-term ability to support a virtualized environment. You may discover that it makes more sense, in both financial and operational terms, to relocate a smaller virtualized data center to a remote location and reallocate the old on-site space to another business activity.

Strive to standardize. Consolidation works best and most efficiently when servers are working within a compatible and standardized environment. This means using identical—or at least highly similar—server hardware configurations, hypervisors and support resources. This means you may have to eliminate some “oddball” servers as you consolidate your base. A technology that operates outside of your data center's existing standards sphere should only be adopted if it delivers some type of immediate meaningful benefit, or if the technology promises to provide a new standards platform that you will be able to base other systems on.

Synchronize your strategy. An easy way to drive up consolidation costs—and trim benefits—is by failing to coordinate a virtualization project with existing server refreshment cycles. Moving a virtualization/consolidation timetable forward or backward by only a few weeks or months can often create significant savings.

Watch for warning signs. virtualization projects don't generally run into trouble without first emitting a string of warning signs. Periodically check error logs and other system-generated alerts for indications that your consolidated servers aren't working smoothly. Remember that little, almost unnoticeable problems have a way of snowballing, gradually driving down data center performance.

Tags: server consolidation, virtualization

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