

Sally Beauty relies on an efficient IT infrastructure to manage its multi-national warehousing and distribution network. By installing Pure Storage FlashArray™ arrays, the company has seen significant improvements in system performance, sharp reductions in capital and operating costs, and dramatically simplified transparent storage management.

SALLY BEAUTY

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

The company has saved significantly on storage-related capital and operating costs, and Pure's radically simplified management has improved operational efficiency for the IT staff.

GEO

North America

INDUSTRY

Retail

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Brian Armstrong,
director of infrastructure and operations

PURE STORAGE PUTS A FRESH NEW FACE ON SALLY BEAUTY'S OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

When Brian Armstrong arrived at Sally Beauty as the new director of infrastructure and operations, he saw that the storage team was working with four cabinets of disk storage from a leading vendor, and they had no reporting whatsoever. “The team couldn't tell me who was using what; they couldn't tell me anything about the performance. It was a black hole.” Even as their SQL Server tools were reporting frequent disk I/O errors and unacceptably high latencies, the IT team had no way of diagnosing the problems, much less fixing them.

Any disruption in IT operations poses a threat to the efficiency of Sally Beauty's far-flung operations. The company — which is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and has annual sales of more than \$3.8B — has over 5,000 stores worldwide, with more than 27,000 full- and part-time employees in 13 countries. Sally Beauty operates 14 distribution centers in the United States and Canada, which support retail stores as well as sales to salons and cosmetologists.

ACCELERATING MISSION-CRITICAL APPS REQUIRES MODERN STORAGE

High-performance storage is essential for supporting the sales-reporting, warehouse management, employee-hours and distribution applications backed by SQL Server. So, when Armstrong learned about the absence of management insight into the storage infrastructure, his reaction was swift and simple. “We had the capital budget, so why hadn't something been done? I decided to give the storage and SQL Server teams something they couldn't complain about.”

To solve the storage problem, Armstrong turned to two companies with whom he had positive experiences at his previous company — Soccour Solutions, a provider of IT solutions, and Pure Storage. Noting that Sally Beauty “runs leans” in its IT staffing, the company did not have time for an extensive vendor evaluation or proof-of-concept trial.

“Pure Storage gave us a FlashArray//M20 to try out, but I knew from previous experience that it would fulfill our needs,” Armstrong recalled. “In the end it was a very easy decision. We had the budget, and I knew that our performance would be better and our operating costs would be lower with Pure Storage.”

The company purchased two FlashArray//M50 models, one each for the main data center in Carrollton, Texas, and a data center in Denton, Texas, that is used for non-production applications and disaster recovery.

COMPANY:

Sally Beauty
www.sallybeauty.com

USE CASE:

- Database – Microsoft® SQL Server®

CHALLENGES:

- IT staff had no visibility into the operations of the legacy storage system.
- SQL Server tools reported high volume of storage errors and unacceptably high latencies.

IT TRANSFORMATION:

- Back-end SQL-based systems run reliably and at peak performance, unhindered by poor storage performance.
- Systems managers have unprecedented visibility into storage system operations.
- Reduced storage footprint results in major savings in operating expenses.

“Everything we couldn’t do with our previous system we can do with Pure Storage. We have a transparency into the arrays that we didn’t have before.”

Brian Armstrong,
director of infrastructure and operations

The Pure Storage arrays support the company’s business-critical applications — including point-of-sale data, warehousing, distribution, employee hours and customer profiles — back-ended by Microsoft SQL Server. “The desire to give our mission-critical business processes the best-performing, best-managed storage was the primary motivator in the acquisition of Pure Storage,” Armstrong said.

PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS DISAPPEAR, STORAGE MANAGEMENT SIMPLIFIED

Armstrong said installation of the Pure Storage arrays has brought improvements in three areas: performance, cost and management.

The operational impact of lagging performance from the previous storage system occurred as often as twice a week when Armstrong arrived, threatening the SQL Server team’s ability to process business-critical data uploaded from some 4,300 stores every night. “That SQL processing needs to take place in a limited window. If that processing isn’t completed, it raises Sev1 or Sev2 incidents.”

Those performance problems have now disappeared since the installation of Pure Storage arrays, based on positive changes in several metrics, including IOPS, latency and de-duplication rates.

Sally Beauty has benefited from significant cost reductions thanks to Pure Storage. First, the capital cost for the two Pure arrays was about 1/10th the initial cost of the disk-based systems they replaced. Second, the de-deduplication and data compression features of the Pure arrays — delivering data reduction ratios in excess of 4:1 — lowered the amount of storage Sally Beauty had to buy, which will meet the company’s needs for the foreseeable future. In addition according to Armstrong, “we are saving massively on space” — 3U of rack space versus two full racks in each data center required by the previous storage systems. That has resulted in large savings in operating costs such as power consumption and rental costs for data-center floor space.

Of greatest significance to Armstrong is the ease and breadth of management for the Pure Storage arrays, especially in comparison to the situation he encountered when he arrived at Sally Beauty.

“It’s a night-and-day difference compared to what we had,” he noted. “There’s very little management we need to do.”

The range of management features also impresses him. “Everything we couldn’t do with our previous system we can do with Pure Storage — capacity management, performance management, seeing who’s using what. We have full transparency into the arrays that we didn’t have before.”



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