

Logicalis Shapes Up Targanta's IT Infrastructure to Meet Pending Demand for World-wide Pharma Distribution



Targanta Therapeutics Corporation is a biopharmaceutical company focused on developing and commercializing innovative antibiotics to treat serious infections in hospitals and other healthcare institutions.

Targanta has grown rapidly through acquisitions during the company's research stage and, in anticipation of the approval of its antibiotics by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA), Targanta needed to prepare its IT infrastructure for the distribution demands that would be made once the company's product entered the marketplace and the medical world began calling and emailing.

As is the case with many fast-growing companies, Targanta's IT infrastructure was a mix of systems. It hosted separate domains at each of its three primary locations—Cambridge, Indianapolis and Montreal—that operated as loosely connected islands. Every-thing worked, but the infrastructure was complex and required an increasing amount of maintenance.

A Need to Grow

Problems were already showing up, says Targanta Director of IT George Papamitrou, mostly in little things: "We had multiple security profiles for each user in each domain that expired at different times. And we had occasional problems with access to PDAs and notebook computers," he says. "There were other side effects from our three-domain infrastructure that required frequent maintenance. We needed to consolidate to a single domain structure for us to grow."

Logicalis had been recommended to Papamitrou by a peer in the pharmacology industry and had been called in to consult on a VMware project several months earlier. This time, Targanta wanted to do more than tweak individual sites. After reviewing the situation with Logicalis, Targanta decided to be proactive and consolidate all three sites, migrate from an Active Directory environment to create a single enterprise-wide domain, and then migrate to Exchange 2007 for email. There would be savings and performance improvements from the two-step upgrade, but the

most compelling benefit was the elimination of complexity and streamlining of the infrastructure.

"We needed to have an infrastructure that could grow with us," Papamitrou says. "We wanted to be ready for increased demand."

During early discussions with Logicalis, it was determined that server virtualization would have to take place before the migration to Exchange 2007. Logicalis Consulting Services Manager Brett Anderson explains: "Targanta needed to consolidate Active Directory before they could migrate to Exchange 2007 and, before they could do that, they had to have two Active Directory servers set up. That's one of the best practices. You always want to have two servers for redundancy, but one rarely gets used, so one is physical and one virtual."

High Availability

Consolidation had the additional benefit of providing high availability with failover redundancy. "Physical servers, by virtue of becoming virtual servers, inherit the high availability that the virtualization provides," Anderson says. "Without having to do anything special, you are able to take normal run-of-the-mill Windows machines and the services they provide, and they inherit high availability by being part of the framework."

Targanta now has two upgraded physical servers for each location, each running four virtual servers. Virtualization provides redundancy, so if power to one physical server dies, its four virtual servers will move to the other physical server. "We tested it," Papamitrou says. "Actually, it wasn't a test. We lost power, and there was a bad battery in one of the UPSs so one physical server shut down entirely. The virtual servers just automatically switched over to the other box. There was no interruption of service. It was pretty impressive."

Anticipating just that kind of event, Anderson says, is why Logicalis establishes a conservative capacity threshold on physical servers, so there will always be enough capacity to accommodate additional virtual servers if the need arises.

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George Papamitrou, Director of IT, Targanta

Another advantage of virtualization is ease of maintenance. Anderson notes, “When you separate and abstract the hardware layer with virtualization, you still need maintenance for those devices, but you don’t need to deal with all the details of specific device drivers for one machine or another, or patching from one vendor to another. The hardware layer becomes much further removed and a less significant part of the overall management strategy.”

It’s also a lot easier to add new servers. “As we grow and need more servers,” Papamitrou says, “all we have to do is buy a license for a Windows server, and we can be up and running in hours instead of specing out a new server, getting a PO, ordering it, and waiting three weeks for delivery.”

Weekend Migration

Once the consolidation was complete, the migration to Exchange could begin in earnest. The actual migration was intended to occur on a single weekend, but it took three months of planning to make sure that the intended weekend went smoothly.

Targanta needed to be confident that the migration could be accomplished without any interruption in email. Besides the fact that the company’s employees in three locations depend on email to communicate with each other, Targanta had recently completed an important filing with the FDA and needed to know that any emails from the FDA would be received without interruption.

Senior Technologist John Donovan worked closely with Logicalis throughout the planning and implementation of the migration. They faced several challenges together, Donovan recalls: Targanta’s largely scientific employees are very technical, i.e. dependent on their computers, and very mobile. More than 90 percent of the users have notebook computers, so scheduling the upgrade of their profiles was complex. Email communications could never be interrupted even though two domains were going to cease to exist—and, of course, everyone’s BlackBerrys had to be live at all times.

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Communication Was Key

“With multiple geographic sites, you always have to overcommunicate,” Papamitrou says. “Logicalis did a great job. The migration was well planned and well communicated throughout the entire company. There was no surprise that we were doing this. The expectation was set and everyone was prepared.”

The weekend of the migration was hectic for the IT staff, but when Targanta opened for regular business hours on Monday, the migration to Exchange 2007 was complete. No emails were lost, and personal email accounts created as a backup for key individuals expecting messages from the FDA were not needed.

“We could not have done this without Logicalis,” says Donovan. “We did not have the knowledge or the resources internally. Working with Logicalis has provided us an environment that can evolve with us as we grow.”

Now that Targanta has an enterprise-wide platform with all of the robust functionality, as well as high-availability, built into Exchange 2007, they are able to deploy technologies like IP telephony and take advantage of the complete range of unified communications features on an as-needed basis.

Consolidating the three locations into one domain, as well as the knowledge transfer provided by Logicalis during both phases of the project, had the additional benefit of helping the IT staff to see themselves as an integral part of the enterprise instead of just their specific location.

“We instill in our folks that they are responsible for the North American network, not just the servers in their site,” Donovan says. “Now that we are one network,” he adds, “we are able to deploy tools that you would see in a traditional enterprise that make it possible for any one person at any location to better support the whole network. That wasn’t the case before. We now have complete visibility across the entire enterprise.”

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