

Dell EMC VxRail vCenter Server Planning Guide

June 2021

Abstract

This planning document provides guidance for various vCenter Server deployment options that are supported on VxRail appliances.

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Executive summary

vCenter Server is the centralized platform for managing a VMware environment. It is the primary point of management for both server virtualization and vSAN. It is also the enabling technology for advanced capabilities such as vMotion, Distributed Resource Scheduler (DRS), and HA. vCenter scales to enterprise levels where a single vCenter can support up to 2,500 hosts (VxRail nodes) and 40,000 powered on virtual machines. See [VMware Configuration Maximums](#) for the latest recommended limits. vCenter supports a logical hierarchy of data centers, clusters, and hosts. This hierarchy allows resources to be separated by use cases or lines of business and allows resources to be moved as needed dynamically. These resource changes are all performed from a single interface.

Intended use and audience

This guide discusses various VMware vCenter Server™ deployment scenarios that are supported to manage your Dell Technologies VxRail™ clusters. It is intended for customers and field engineers who are involved in selling, planning, and installing VxRail, including Dell Technologies Sales and Support personnel.

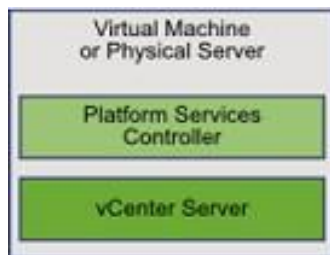
vCenter Server 7.0

Starting with vSphere v7.0, external Platform Services Controller (PSC) is deprecated. The only option is vCenter Server with embedded PSC.

- The new vCenter Server contains all PSC services, preserving the functionality and workflows, including authentication, certificate management, tags, and licensing.
- The vCenter Server group of services contains vCenter Server, vSphere Web Client, Inventory Service, vSphere Auto Deploy, vSphere ESXi Dump Collector, VMware vSphere Syslog Collector on Windows, and VMware vSphere Syslog Service for the vCenter Server.

vCenter Server 7.0 with embedded PSC

The vCenter Server and the PSC are deployed on a single virtual machine or single physical server.



For details, see [vCenter Server Installation and Setup VMware vSphere 7.0](#)

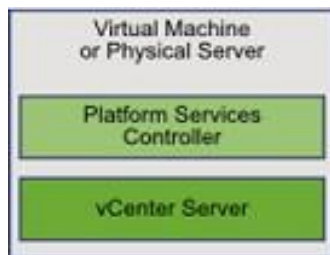
vCenter Server 6.0 through 6.7

vSphere v6.0 introduced vCenter Server with an embedded PSC and vCenter Server with an external PSC. The following components are part of the vCenter Server installations:

- The PSC group of infrastructure services contains vCenter Single Sign-On, License service, Lookup service, and VMware Certificate Authority.
- The vCenter Server group of services contains vCenter Server, vSphere Web Client, Inventory Service, vSphere Auto Deploy, vSphere ESXi Dump Collector, VMware vSphere Syslog Collector on Windows, and VMware vSphere Syslog Service for the vCenter Server.

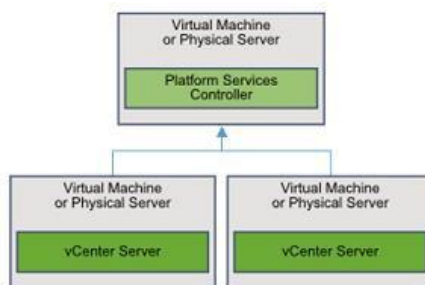
vCenter Server with an embedded PSC

The vCenter Server and the PSC are deployed on a single virtual machine or single physical server.



vCenter Server with an external PSC

The vCenter Server and the PSC are deployed as separate virtual machines or physical servers. The PSC can be shared by one or more vCenter Server instances. You can deploy a PSC, then install several vCenter Server instances and register them with the PSC. You can install another PSC, configure it to replicate with the first PSC, and then install additional vCenter Server instances and register them with the second PSC.



For more details, see the following:

- [vCenter Server Installation and Setup vCenter Server 6.7](#) for VxRail 4.7.0+
- [vSphere Installation and Setup Guide VMware vSphere 6.5](#) for VxRail 4.5.0+
- [vSphere Installation and Setup Guide Update 2 VMware vSphere 6.0](#) for VxRail 4.0.x

VxRail appliances

VxRail is jointly developed by Dell Technologies and VMware. It is the only fully integrated, preconfigured, and tested HCI appliance that is powered by VMware Virtual SAN (vSAN). VxRail is managed through the vCenter Server interface. It provides a familiar vSphere experience and enables streamlined deployment and extensibility of existing IT tools and processes.

VxRail appliances are managed using VxRail HCI system software for hardware and maintenance tasks as well as software life-cycle management (LCM). VxRail HCI system software incorporates Secure Remote Services (SRS) and other serviceability capabilities. VxRail appliances are discoverable and visible in Dell EMC Vision™ Intelligent Operations.

Note: For day-to-day VM management, you manage the VMware stack on the VxRail directly through the vCenter server.

The VxRail software bundle is preloaded and licensed onto hardware and consists of the following components (specific software versions not shown):

- VxRail HCI system software
- VMware vCenter Server
- VMware vSAN™
- Dell Secure Remote Services (SRS)/VE

Also preloaded is VMware vSphere®. However, licenses are required and can be purchased through Dell Technologies, VMware, or your preferred VMware reseller partner.

The VxRail clusters also include licenses for software that can be downloaded, installed, and configured:

- Dell EMC RecoverPoint for Virtual Machines (RP4VM) - 15 full licenses per G-series chassis, or five full licenses for all other single node VxRail appliances

VxRail is fully compatible with other software in the VMware ecosystem, including VMware NSX. See the [VMware Product Interoperability Matrices](#) for specific versions of NSX supported on specific versions of vSphere.

VxRail vCenter Server options

The initial releases of VxRail deployed a vCenter Server on the VxRail. A standard vCenter Server license for this vCenter Server appliance is included with VxRail. This vCenter Server deployment has been referred to as “internal” or “embedded” vCenter Server. For consistency, the term that is used throughout this guide is VxRail-managed vCenter Server. VxRail orchestrates the deployment and life-cycle management of the VxRail vCenter Server.

Before VxRail v7.0.130, the VxRail-managed vCenter Server could only manage the VxRail cluster on which it was deployed. Starting with v7.0.130, the VxRail-managed vCenter Server can manage multiple VxRail clusters. When performing LCM in this environment, upgrade the VxRail cluster that supports the internal VxRail-managed vCenter Server before any external VxRail clusters. VxRail Manager still performs LCM for all clusters. See [Overview of the vSphere Process](#) for best practice order of upgrade.

A VxRail appliance can optionally join a compatible customer-supplied vCenter Server environment, hosted outside of the VxRail cluster. This option allows for a central vCenter Server instance to manage multiple VxRail clusters. Each VxRail environment appears within vCenter Server as a cluster of hosts configured with a vSAN datastore. This environment has been referred to as “external” or “existing” vCenter Server. For consistency, the term that is used throughout this guide is customer-supplied vCenter Server.

With VxRail 7.0.130 and later, VxRail Manager no longer validates whether an externalized or customer-supplied vCenter Server is compatible with the VxRail software on the cluster. See [KB 000157682](#) to confirm that your customer-supplied vCenter Server is running the minimum compatible version before initiating the installation of the cluster or adding nodes to the cluster.

This instance of vCenter Server must exist before you deploy the VxRail and requires a separate customer-provided license. Following is a table of supported vCenter Server licenses on customer-supplied vCenter Servers.

Table 1. Supported vCenter Server licenses

	vCenter Server for Essentials	vCenter Server Foundation	vCenter Server Standard
Number of hosts	Up to 3	Up to 4	Unlimited
vSphere licenses - managed	vSphere Essentials and vSphere Essentials Plus	vSphere Standard, vSphere Enterprise Plus, and VMware vCloud Suite	vSphere Standard, vSphere Enterprise Plus, and vCloud Suite
VxRail 7.x support	Not supported	2-node ROBO support only	Standard, 2-node ROBO, and stretched clusters
VxRail 4.7.x support	Not supported	Not supported	Standard, 2-node ROBO, and stretched clusters

The information in this table is sourced from the [VMware vSphere Compute Virtualization Licensing](#) guide.

The customer is responsible for deployment, configuration, and life-cycle management of the customer-supplied vCenter Server.

Notes

-
- Customer is responsible for the customer-supplied vCenter Server license.
 - Only one public IP address for customer-supplied vCenter HA network is supported.
 - VxRail-managed vCenter server does not support vCenter HA.
-

The virtual infrastructure of a VxRail cluster is managed by a single vCenter Server instance, either VxRail vCenter Server or customer-supplied vCenter Server. When VxRail is deployed, the vCenter deployment type is selected and is difficult to change. Changing from a customer-supplied vCenter Server to VxRail-managed vCenter Server requires a factory reset and all data to be wiped from the VxRail and reinstalled. On the other hand, migrating a VxRail-managed vCenter Server to a customer-supplied vCenter is possible but requires a Request for Product Qualification (RPQ) and must be performed by your Dell Technologies services team.

Starting with VxRail 4.7.x, VxRail-managed vCenter Server can be externalized through the VxRail plug-in.

Note: When using VxRail version 4.x, the customer-supplied vCenter Server can provide more configuration options and is sometimes recommended.

VxRail vCenter Server 7.0

As part of a VxRail deployment, a vCenter Server instance with embedded PSC is configured. The vCenter Server and the PSC are hosted on a single Linux-based virtual machine. The vCenter Server with embedded PSC is deployed on the VxRail cluster it is managing and cannot be moved off the cluster after deployment.

The VxRail vCenter license is a standard vCenter license for the VxRail vCenter Server. It is not transferable to be used for a customer-supplied vCenter Server. As such, it can be considered a limited or restricted-use vCenter Server license.

Use cases

A VxRail vCenter Server is an ideal choice for:

- Multi-cluster VxRail support as of VxRail version 7.0.130.
- Enhanced Linked Mode between VxRail-managed vCenter Servers ([see 7.0 limitations](#) in this document). Up to 15 linked vCenter Server instances are supported.
- Standalone environments

Note: Stretched clusters are not recommended because if an Inter-Switch Link (ISL) fails and site-affinity rule is used (PFTT=0), all virtual machines that are not on the same site as the vCenter will be powered off.

Limitations (7.0)

- Enhanced link mode is not supported in the following scenarios. See the **vCenter Enhanced Linked Mode Prerequisites** section of the [VMware Install Guide](#) for more detailed information.
 - On first run in VxRail versions earlier than 7.0.100 for VxRail-managed vCenter Servers.
 - Between a VxRail-managed vCenter Server and customer-supplied vCenter Server.
 - As a Day 2 operation (repoint) in VxRail versions earlier than 7.0.200 for VxRail-managed vCenter Servers.
- Single Sign-On domain is *vsphere.local* and cannot be customized.
- VxRail vCenter Server does not support encryption in VxRail versions earlier than 4.5.200.

VxRail vCenter Server 6.0 through 6.7

As part of a VxRail deployment, a vCenter Server instance with an external PSC is configured. The vCenter Server and the PSC are separate Linux-based virtual appliances. Both the VxRail vCenter Server and PSC are deployed on the VxRail cluster they are managing and cannot be moved off the cluster after deployment.

The VxRail vCenter license is a standard vCenter license for the VxRail vCenter Server. It is not transferable to be used for a customer-supplied vCenter Server. As such, it can be considered a limited or restricted use vCenter Server license.

Use cases

A VxRail vCenter Server is an ideal choice for:

- Single VxRail clusters
- Standalone environments

Note: Stretched clusters are not recommended because if an Inter-Switch Link (ISL) failure occurs and site-affinity rule is used (PFTT=0), all virtual machines that are not on the same site as the vCenter will be powered off.

Limitations (6.x)

- The VxRail vCenter Server manages its own VxRail cluster only. It cannot manage other VxRail clusters or any other ESXi hosts.
 - It cannot be used as a customer-supplied vCenter Server.
- Enhanced link mode is not supported with VxRail-managed vCenters.
- Single Sign-On domain is *vsphere.local* and cannot be customized.
- VxRail vCenter Server does not support encryption in VxRail versions earlier than 4.5.200.

Customer-supplied vCenter Server

The following figure shows an example where multiple VxRail clusters are part of a customer-supplied vCenter environment. Each cluster is separate but managed centrally. Being managed from the same vCenter environment allows VMs to be easily migrated between vSAN environments for optimal workload balance and simplifies VxRail upgrades and expansion.

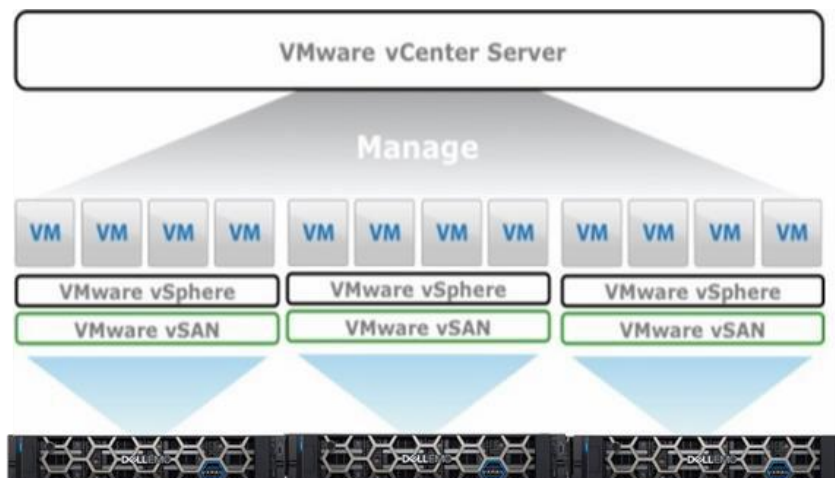


Figure 1. Customer-supplied vCenter environment with multiple VxRail clusters

Note: The customer-supplied vCenter Server deployment can be a physical server or a virtual server running on a vCenter Server appliance.

Use cases

A customer-supplied vCenter Server solution is required when:

- VxRail 4.x is being added to an existing VMware platform, and a single management instance is desired.
- Multiple VxRail clusters are deployed using VxRail version 4.x, and a single management interface is desired.
- vCenter Server cannot be deployed on the 2-node cluster.

In versions earlier than VxRail 4.5.200, customer-supplied vCenter Server solution is required when:

- Stretched clusters are part of the solution.
- vSAN encryption is desired. When enabling Data at Rest Encryption (DARE) in a vSAN cluster, the Key Management Server (KMS) must be external to the vSAN cluster.

Limitations

- VxRail Manager does not upgrade the customer-supplied vCenter Server. Before upgrading your VxRail software, see the release notes to verify the minimum required vCenter Server release number. You might have to upgrade the customer-supplied vCenter Server before the VxRail upgrade. See [KB 000157682](#).
- RPQ is required if the customer-supplied vCenter Server is hosted on a VxRail cluster running versions earlier than 4.7.
 - The VxRail cluster shutdown function requires that you power off all VMs manually.
 - We highly recommend the vCenter be backed up to a remote site in case a vSAN failure occurs.

Notes

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- You are responsible for the customer-supplied vCenter Server license.
 - Log Insight is not activated when using a customer-supplied vCenter Server.
 - Only one public IP address for the vCenter HA network is supported.
-

VMware vSphere recommended topologies for vCenter Server 7.0

There are no VMware-published recommended topologies for vCenter Server 7.0.

VMware vSphere recommended topologies for vCenter Server 6.0 through 6.7

VMware provides a list of recommended topologies for VMware vCenter Server deployments. The vCenter Server topologies are described in VMware KB article [2147672](#) for vSphere 6.5 and VMware KB article [2108548](#) for vSphere 6.0.

VxRail vCenter Server deployment details

Following are the high-level details of each deployment option. It is important to understand the prerequisites before deployment. This document covers the requirements that are related to vCenter Server only. See the [Dell EMC VxRail Network Planning Guide](#) for complete VxRail implementation requirements.

VxRail vCenter Server

Note: The vCenter license that is included with the VxRail appliance is for use of the VxRail vCenter Server only. It is not transferable for use as a customer-supplied vCenter Server.

Requirements

This scenario requires:

- A reserved vCenter Server hostname
- A reserved IP address for the VxRail vCenter Server
- A reserved PSC hostname
- A reserved IP address for the new VxRail vCenter Server Platform Service Controller
- DNS names to be configured correctly

Note: PSC Hostname and IP Address are not needed when using VxRail 7.0 with vCenter Server 7.0.

Customer-supplied vCenter Server

When deploying VxRail into an existing VMware infrastructure, use the customer-supplied vCenter Server that is managing the current environment to also manage VxRail. This allows an external vCenter Server to manage multiple VxRail clusters in a single management instance.

The customer-supplied vCenter Server can be:

- Standalone with an embedded PSC or external PSC¹
- A vCenter Server virtual appliance or vCenter Server for Windows²
- Using Enhanced Linked Mode

Requirements

- In versions earlier than VxRail 4.5.200, the customer-supplied vCenter cannot be hosted on the VxRail cluster it is managing.
- Starting with VxRail 4.5.200, except for 2-node clusters, the customer-supplied vCenter Server can be hosted on the VxRail cluster it is managing. You must shut down the vCenter Server to use the shutdown cluster feature.
- Check the VxRail Release Notes to determine the proper version numbers. The ESXi version hosting the vCSA should be running version 6.0 or later.
 - VxRail 4.0.x and vSphere 6.0 [VxRail Release Notes version 4.0.x](#)

¹ External PSC is deprecated starting with version 7.0.

² vCenter Server for Windows has been deprecated starting with vSphere 7.0.

Conclusion

- VxRail 4.5.x and vSphere 6.5 [VxRail Release Notes version 4.5.x](#)
- VxRail 4.7.x and vSphere 6.7 [VxRail Release Notes version 4.7.x](#)
- VxRail 7.x and vSphere 7.0 [VxRail Release Notes version 7.0.x](#)
- You must provide the vCenter Server license.

If you want VxRail to join a customer-supplied vCenter Server, you must:

- Know the customer-supplied vCenter Server FQDN.
- Know whether your customer-supplied vCenter Server has an embedded or external PSC. If the PSC is external, you will need the PSC FQDN.
- Know the *Existing* Single Sign-On domain (SSO) (for example, *vsphere.local*).
- Create a VxRail management user and password for this VxRail cluster on the customer-supplied vCenter Server. This user must be:
 - Created with no permissions
 - Created with no roles assigned to it

Note: If a previous VxRail cluster was deployed on the customer-supplied vCenter Server, the same VxRail Management user can be reused for additional VxRail clusters that are managed by the same vCenter Server.

- Create or select a data center on the customer-supplied vCenter Server for the VxRail cluster to join.
- Specify the name of the cluster that is created by VxRail in the selected data center when the cluster is built. This name must be unique and not used anywhere in the data center on the customer-supplied vCenter Server.
- Verify that the DNS server can resolve all VxRail ESXi hostnames before deployment.
- (Optional) Create a VxRail non-admin user and password for VxRail on the customer-supplied vCenter Server. The following will be performed by your Dell Technologies representative:
 - Create two new roles: VxRail Initial Global and VxRail Data Center Global.
 - Assign each of these roles to the new VxRail admin user.

Note: Starting with VxRail 4.5.200, you can deploy a customer-supplied vCenter Server on an existing VxRail cluster, even the cluster it is managing. You must still provide a vCenter Server license.

Conclusion

During the planning stage of a VxRail cluster configuration, careful planning should take place to determine the best vCenter Server deployment topology for your environment. VxRail gives you the option of using a customer-supplied vCenter Server so that more topologies can be supported.

For more details about the best vCenter deployment options, contact your Dell Technologies Sales team or your VMware representative.