

Where the smart money is going in terms of IT

Fintech company Ascend Money enhances its pace of innovation by moving toward a software-defined data center with Dell EMC servers and storage and VMware vSAN



Financial Services

Thailand

Business needs

Ascend Money wanted to transform the IT underpinning its six locations across Southeast Asia. It wanted to pave the way for a software-defined data center by moving from its non-standardized platforms, which included servers and storage from multiple vendors, to software-defined IT.

Solutions at a glance

- [Dell EMC vSAN Ready Nodes](#)
- [Dell EMC PowerEdge servers](#)
- [Dell EMC SC Series storage](#)
- [Dell ProDeploy](#)
- [Dell EMC OpenManage Integration for VMware vCenter® \(OMIVV\)](#)
- [VMware vSphere® and vSAN](#)

Business results

- Enables continued innovation with software-defined IT
- Standardized on reliable server performance with PowerEdge
- Consolidated IT hardware by two-thirds with SC Series storage
- Zero learning curve to simplified control with OMIVV
- Five-day deployments across six locations with Dell ProDeploy

“We can build development environments faster and at less cost with so many processes automated using vSAN.”

John Catrall
Head of Technology Operations, Ascend Money

Headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand, Ascend Money is one of Southeast Asia's largest fintech companies. Its services include TrueMoney, an award-winning regional payment platform.

Ascend Money has succeeded through innovation—changing the way people access financial services. The company knows its pace of innovation depends on the IT underpinning the business, which made the server and storage challenges across Ascend Money's six locations a business priority.

An innovation roadblock

The main challenge was that the IT platforms underpinning the six locations were not standardized and included a mix of servers, for example, which couldn't all handle the same workloads. In addition, storage was either directly attached to servers or provided through a dedicated storage network. The discrepancies in storage between locations made it difficult to achieve high availability companywide. More importantly, the lack of standardization was a roadblock to Ascend Money's software-defined data center (SDDC) strategy.

John Cattrall, head of technology operations at Ascend Money, says, "Our goal is to move to an SDDC architecture where deployment is done through code. As part of that journey, we looked to standardize the infrastructures across Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines and Myanmar to support our entire operation."

The journey begins to SDDC

Ascend Money traditionally bought servers from Tier 1 vendors such as HPE, IBM and Dell EMC. "We decided to standardize on Dell EMC PowerEdge because of the build quality and the local support available," says Cattrall. "All our IT engineers are familiar with the PowerEdge platform. Regular firmware updates help maintain the security of the servers and OpenManage software simplifies management through a 'single pane of glass.'"

The local Dell EMC team introduced Ascend Money to Dell EMC vSAN Ready Nodes, which are built on preconfigured Dell EMC PowerEdge servers that are tested and certified to run VMware vSAN. For many companies, Dell EMC vSAN Ready Nodes provide the initial building blocks for a software-defined data center.

Transformation with PowerEdge servers and SC Series arrays

At an early stage in discussions, Ascend Money highlighted the need for a midrange storage solution to work alongside a vSAN-based platform. Explains Cattrall, "We wanted an easy-to-manage storage solution for storing workload data such as system and application logs. The idea was to separate storage workloads to maximize vSAN performance." Ascend Money already had experience with Dell EMC SC Series storage arrays and put forward the idea of including the SC Series with a vSAN solution.

"We found that the SC Series storage is compact, helping us to reduce our hardware footprint by two-thirds in some locations."

John Cattrall
Head of Technology Operations,
Ascend Money



He says, “We knew how reliable the SC Series was as a block storage system. Like the PowerEdge servers, it’s well supported and simplifies management. Its tight integration with VMware was also an important factor because of the vSAN adoption.”

Five-day deployment per location

Ascend Money maximized the efficiency of the vSAN deployment using Dell ProDeploy. The offering includes installation, configuration and integration services. As a result, it took approximately five days in each of the six countries to deploy the platform. “The same team deployed the solution everywhere, following well-defined scripts and taking advantage of built-in automation,” says Cattrall. “We were impressed by the quality of the work and speed of handover.”

At each of Ascend Money’s six locations, the company has production and nonproduction clusters of Dell EMC vSAN Ready Nodes. Each node includes a Dell EMC PowerEdge R740xd server, featuring solid-state drives. The servers run VMware vSphere and vSAN for software-defined server and storage virtualization and a Red Hat OpenShift Kubernetes platform for managing Ascend Money’s containerized applications. These applications support the company’s core business processes.

Dell EMC SC Series all-flash and hybrid solutions enable log storage at production sites as well as data replication for disaster recovery at the nonproduction sites. Dell EMC Networking S5048 and S3048 switches provide 25 gigabit Ethernet (GbE) links at the network core and 1GbE links at the edge.

Zero learning curve with OpenManage

Ascend Money has simplified IT management through the migration to Dell EMC vSAN Ready Nodes. Each preconfigured vSAN Ready Node has the right amount of processor performance, memory and storage as well as network I/O controllers to get the best out of vSAN.

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Furthermore, in Ascend Money's case, the platform includes OpenManage Integration for VMware vCenter (OMIVV), a systems management plug-in from Dell EMC that dramatically reduces complexity by enabling the company to monitor platform performance and implement firmware updates for both virtual and nonvirtual machines from within vCenter. Cattrall says, "We can see the health of our vSAN environment through just one console with OMIVV. For us, the beauty of OMIVV is there is no learning curve—our IT personnel didn't lose any time figuring out how to use it."

Consolidating hardware by two-thirds

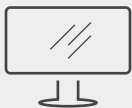
Ascend Money has consolidated hardware across its six locations using the vSAN Ready Nodes and SC Series storage. "We found that the SC Series storage is compact," says Cattrall, "helping us to reduce our hardware footprint by two-thirds in some locations." The self-optimizing tiering features in the SC Series also allows Ascend Money to increase the cost-effectiveness of its storage environment. "Our cost-per-terabyte has been reduced by implementing the SC Series solution," says Cattrall. "Likewise, the energy efficiency of the solution, compared with older storage technologies, helps us bring down our costs."

Enabling greater innovation

The company can focus on moving its SDDC strategy forward, including the adoption of an IT-as-a-service model. vSAN and solutions such as OMIVV give Ascend Money the cost transparency and management simplicity to effectively bundle up IT services and provide them to business teams as a service. Furthermore, the simplicity also frees up IT resources for Ascend Money so it can focus on its OpenShift Kubernetes platform and get new software releases out to the business more rapidly. Cattrall says, "We can build development environments faster and at less cost with so many processes automated using vSAN. Our IT platform today provides greater business agility."

Readily available support across the region

Ascend Money also has peace of mind from having localized support through Dell EMC ProSupport. "We've always been highly satisfied with services from Dell Technologies Services support," says Cattrall. "Plus, in the locations where support teams aren't directly available, there is still first-line assistance to help tackle any issues."



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