

## Case study

# AmeriPride Services

## Service firm leverages HP BladeSystem to adapt business model



### Industry

Uniform rental and linen supply

### Objective

Transform IT platform to enable “extreme customer service” including digital information access

### Approach

Deploy an extensible, flexible architecture based on HP ProLiant BL460c Gen8 Server Blades

### IT matters

- Consolidate 45 branches into single data center
- Provision POC environments in minutes vs. one month
- Deploy new technologies utilizing existing platform
- Leverage self-monitoring servers for proactive alerting and resolution

### Business matters

- Meet customer demand for digital, mobile communication
- Hone competitive edge through rapid concept testing
- Extend value of existing technology investments



**“Our customers today look for information on digital and mobile platforms as well as traditional ones. HP BladeSystem provides us a flexible platform for continual transformation and innovation.”**

– Joe Jansen, director of Information Services, AmeriPride Services



AmeriPride Services is a leading North American uniform rental and linen supply company. Based in Minnetonka, Minn., AmeriPride operates more than 115 production facilities and service centers throughout the United States and Canada. The company provides linen, uniforms, floor care, restroom and cleaning products to nearly 150,000 customers each week, and employs more than 5,600. Founded in 1889, AmeriPride maintains its competitive edge by staying close to its customers, including adopting the digital and mobile communications technologies that customers increasingly favor. To gain the needed platform agility, AmeriPride transformed its IT environment using data center technologies and services from HP.

“The rental business is personal,” says Joe Jansen, director of Information Services. “AmeriPride delivery drivers know their customers by name, and the company has built its brand through extreme customer service. But the world is changing, and customers today also want to interact with AmeriPride online and through mobile technologies. What’s more, AmeriPride employees rely on information systems to do their jobs—everyone from sales and finance staff to drivers, who need accurate load lists and routing to the dozens of stops they make every day. To establish an IT platform to meet current and future demands, AmeriPride turned to HP.”

**“HP ProLiant BL460 Gen8 Server Blades continuously monitor their own cycle time and processing to send alerts we can address proactively before business impact.”**

– Jeff Baken, data center manager,  
AmeriPride Services

“The personal relationship is still very important, but with changing demographics we have to adjust our business model,” Jansen says. “Customers today want to interact with us digitally. They want account information instantly, at their fingertips, through whatever channel they choose. Instead of a personal meeting once a week, we have to provide 24x7 digital access. And to offer that up, we had to change our technology platform.”

## **Consolidate, centralize using HP BladeSystem**

Before beginning its IT transformation in 2007, AmeriPride’s technology environment was distributed across 45 plants, each with a server closet or corner of office space. The company used aging servers of various makes and models, and was running out of floor space as well as heating and cooling capacity. AmeriPride set out to virtualize, standardize, consolidate and centralize its data center environment. HP at the time had just introduced new blade technology, which caught Jansen’s attention. A blade is a self-contained server that fits alongside other blades in an enclosure that provides power, cooling, connectivity and management. HP Partner Works Computing of Bloomington, Minn., provides AmeriPride with consulting expertise and lab environments to try out

new technology before purchasing. After testing HP blades, AmeriPride acquired two HP BladeSystem c7000 Enclosures. Today the company runs all 45 branches on six enclosures in its Minnetonka data center, with backup data storage and colocation at a SunGard facility in Chicago. Its environment is 90% virtualized on VMware, with business applications running either on Red Hat Linux or Microsoft® Windows®. The HP server blades offer interoperability between operating systems, simplifying blade swap outs.

The HP blade architecture AmeriPride established in 2007 has provided a foundation for continual IT transformation. When technology advances, the company can upgrade in a modular fashion without starting over from scratch; its existing platform investments deliver ongoing value. “The blade environment provides flexibility,” says Jeff Baken, AmeriPride Data Center Manager. “We can add and integrate servers quickly. And everything we’ve built in support of the current architecture, we’ll be able to reuse. As technology evolves, you don’t have to re-architect everything—the environment and the procedures for maintaining our infrastructure remain constant, saving us time and money.”

## **An extensible platform for growth**

AmeriPride started with the first generation of HP ProLiant blades and now deploys HP ProLiant BL460c Gen8 Server Blades. “The Gen8 blades are highly intelligent, with self-monitoring that sends alerts before the business sees any impact,” Baken says. “Instead of being reactive to problems, we can be proactive and prevent problems from occurring.”

For storage, AmeriPride for four years relied on the HP XP24000 Enterprise Virtual Array and in all that time experienced not a single outage due to the storage solution. It recently migrated to an HP 3PAR StoreServ7400 Storage, with a primary storage area network (SAN) in Minnetonka and a secondary one in Chicago for disaster recovery. It also uses HP StoreOnceBackup Appliance for local recovery, for example if an executive accidentally deletes an email, they can recover the document within minutes by not having to go to a tape backup. The “HP 3PAR eases management by delivering clear visibility into AmeriPride data and performance,” Baken says. “It’s a storage solution designed for cloud processing, and while we don’t use

## Customer at a glance

### Application

Service management, route tracking, accounting, customer-facing web and mobile applications

### Hardware

- HP BladeSystem c7000 Enclosures
- HP Virtual Connect Flex-10/10D Module for BladeSystem c-Class
- HP ProLiant BL460c G7 and Gen8 Server Blades
- HP 3PAR StoreServ 7400 Storage
- HP StoreOnce Backup

### Software

- HP Systems Insight Manager
- HP Insight Control for VMware vCenter Server
- HP Data Protector Software
- Red Hat Linux
- Microsoft® Windows®

### HP services

- HP Proactive Care with Personalized Support\*

\*Since this case study was completed, the Personalized Support option was retired. Customers can get more personalized collaboration by working with an assigned, local Account Support Manager included in Proactive Care Advanced service.

multi-tenancy, we employ the cloud disciplines of automation, monitoring, templating, quick delivery, and moving around multiple workloads.” HP Systems Insight Manager and HP Insight Control for VMware vCenter Server provide centralized server management and ease lifecycle control. HP Virtual Connect software allows AmeriPride to better manage network traffic coming out of the servers. “We can carve the 10 gig connection any way we deem fit through commands versus physical connections,” Baken says. “If one application has high demand, we can dynamically move more bandwidth to that server. It takes virtualization to another layer.”

AmeriPride relies on HP Proactive Care Service with Personalized Support.\* Onsite collaboration with an HP Account Support Manager (ASM) has helped AmeriPride apply best practices in technology migrations and ensure the company runs its converged environment efficiently.

## Flexible architecture delivers strategic business value

The virtual infrastructure running on HP ProLiant BL460c Server Blades enables AmeriPride’s IT staff of 45 to deliver strategic value to the company’s business units, from operations to finance, human resources, and sales. IT can provision virtual environments for proof of concept (POC) tests within minutes, instead of spending a month acquiring and preparing specialized physical hardware that may not be able to be repurposed once the project is done. “We can dynamically repurpose our resources, saving time and money” Baken says. “This allows us to innovate on the ‘fast to fail’ concept, trying out ideas and bringing them quickly to market, or changing our approach if the idea doesn’t pan out.” In line with this, AmeriPride has been developing new web and mobile applications to bring it closer to customers.

Faster provisioning is just one of the success metrics AmeriPride tracks. Its data center footprint is down 30%, and its server instance has grown 20%. The energy load has dropped from 73% to 43%. AmeriPride has more server power in less space, using less energy—all while increasing its competitive agility. From twice daily outages six years ago, AmeriPride experiences virtually zero downtime, with automated failover of core applications such as the Absolute Business Systems ERP system. A recent test of the new HP 3PAR system aced Recovery Time Objectives (RTO).

## Next steps: HP Moonshot, social networking

AmeriPride almost exclusively uses HP desktop PCs, and is piloting HP ElitePads to give its sales force and mobile workers touch capabilities in a Windows environment. The company also is looking into HP Moonshot high density server technology. HP Moonshot is the world’s first software defined web server, built to address the data center challenges posed by social, mobile, cloud, and Big Data applications—all technologies AmeriPride is moving to leverage.


“HP provides us with the right technology foundation to turn our infrastructure quickly toward competitive customer-facing activity.”

— Joe Jansen, director of Information Services, AmeriPride Services

“We’re looking into Big Data and social media, business analytics, and asking ourselves what kind of value we can derive from them,” Baken says. “HP allows us to build on our existing platform, integrating innovative new technologies to meet the demands of the future.”

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