

## Virtualization from SouthTech Helps MGA Insurance Save Money, Time and Space

**It's an old story:** a business starts small but grows steadily. But its IT infrastructure grows right along with it, and before anyone even notices, the server room is crammed full of expensive, inefficient hardware that actually makes it harder to get things done.

Sarasota, Florida's MGA Insurance Group is one of many businesses that have found themselves in exactly that situation. As MGA grew larger, the company began to add applications and systems to its existing IT infrastructure. These systems weren't always compatible with each other, so MGA followed standard operating procedure and simply added new servers to avoid conflicts between processes.

The result? Server sprawl.

"When I started working here, we had two very tiny servers that handled everything we needed. Over the years that number grew to 16, and by the end of 2009 a lot of that equipment was pretty old," says Chuck Wolbert, MGA's IT director for the last nine years.

"Several years ago I took a look at our IT infrastructure and asked my IT department, 'why do I need a new server for every system I put up?'" says Lou Marinaccio, president and owner of MGA Insurance. "It seemed wasteful and costly, and I wanted to hear about alternatives."

Sarasota's SouthTech Solutions had some ideas right away, says Kevin Rager, one of SouthTech's enterprise engineers.

**"Virtualization was the obvious choice for MGA. It gives you the ability to run multiple workloads on a single piece of hardware, without conflict. It enables a company to consolidate the number of servers they have. Before virtualization, you couldn't put multiple applications on one server because there may be conflicts between applications, or you might need different operating systems for different processes."**



### Website:

[www.mga-insurance.com](http://www.mga-insurance.com)

### Business Challenge:

Server sprawl. MGA Insurance had a room full of old, inefficient servers. Their IT infrastructure was aging and was costing them a great deal of money in cooling and maintenance.

### Solution:

SouthTech built a virtualized environment for MGA Insurance based on server consolidation and centralized storage.

### Results:

Higher efficiency, fewer servers, and better data security. The costs of maintaining and replacing IT infrastructure components has dropped dramatically, and business processes run better than ever.



So why wasn't MGA operating in a fully virtualized environment? The answer, at least back then, was as simple as the question: cost. "We started considering virtualization about five years ago, but it was too expensive at the time," says Wolbert.

Until recently, that is. "When the economics of server hardware shifted to the point where you could get much more powerful servers at close to the same price as older equipment, we told Lou we could finally address the server sprawl issue," says Rager. "We showed him how we could pursue virtualization to reduce his costs, power consumption, cooling, and the amount of real estate required to house all the equipment."

The more the people at MGA thought about it, the more sense it made. So in February of 2010, SouthTech began working with MGA to get the virtualization process rolling. The new virtualized system took six months to be fully operational, as the processes of configuration and testing were constantly being refined. SouthTech helped MGA come down to three servers, and then added three new virtualized systems to the configuration—all with enough headroom to allow for future growth and the addition of even more systems. IT experts from both companies worked together on the project; it was a partnership in the truest sense of the word.

"Kevin put together a program for us that laid out how all the servers would be connected," said Wolbert. "We ended up replacing two of our old servers with new equipment that had more high-end volume, and were both faster and easier to upgrade."

"We decided to use VMware, which is a high availability option for virtualization," explains Rager. "It gave MGA failover capabilities, so if one host fails, all the processes move to one of the other servers. VMware offers better fault tolerance and better disaster recovery, because processes are encapsulated in files we can back up and move around. Plus, it's hardware independent." Since virtualization was intended to be part of MGA's disaster recovery plan, the system MGA and SouthTech built was designed with the unforeseen in mind.

**"Our virtualization plan has triple backup capacity," says Wolbert. "If one server fails, it automatically rolls over to one of the other two, so we'd have to lose all three to be completely out of business. This is the perfect way to back up and protect against disaster. With a third virtualized server, I am completely confident that if one fails we still have two working servers."**

"Kevin's knowledge about how everything fit together and that everything would run was probably the single most important thing that SouthTech brought to the table," says Wolbert. "Of course, I expected that. We have past experience with SouthTech, so I was confident that everything would work as planned. I would have been a lot more hesitant to bring someone in from the outside.

"You can buy equipment anywhere," he adds. "It's the quality of service and the depth of knowledge SouthTech exhibits that built our confidence in their people."



Shown above: The MGA Insurance Group Team