



Case Study: Albridge Solutions

Virtualization for Competitive Advantage

Business Value

- Server repurposing in minutes
- N+1 HA
- Lower system administration requirements
- Lower TCO
- Faster time to market

"Albridge evaluated many configurations as part of a project to improve throughput, response time, scalability, reliability and recovery and determined that the Egenera BladeFrame system was the best solution. The Egenera BladeFrame's unique virtualized architecture will allow Albridge to continue increasing the levels of service and reliability we offer clients."

*Greg Pacholski
President and CEO
Albridge*

Executive Summary

Albridge Solutions has migrated from proprietary RISC/UNIX servers to the Egenera® BladeFrame® system running Linux® on x86 processors. Initially, IT considered building a virtualized environment from white boxes, but found that complexity and management would be overwhelming. Blade servers from the industry's largest vendors were also ruled out since their legacy architectures made virtualization and resource sharing impossible. Today, with the Egenera BladeFrame, Albridge can run any application on any blade at any time based on demand, breaking the one application/one server model IT shops have struggled with for years.

Business Challenge

Ask executives at Albridge Solutions what gives the Inc. 500 company its competitive advantage, and the answer is definitive: technology. A developer and hoster of Web-based software that consolidates customer data for financial institutions, Albridge earned Inc.'s No. 32 slot for 2005 based on revenue growth over the past three years. The company attributes this remarkable expansion largely to its investments in IT, including development of its proprietary Albridge Wealth Reporting solution and the datacenter infrastructure that powers this unique application.

"Clients choose Albridge for two reasons: the quality and availability of the data we provide," explains Rao Pallepati, vice president of information systems and security, Albridge. "Our software is used by 100 financial-services firms representing \$850 billion in assets and servicing 60,000 financial advisors. To deliver the results these customers demand, we invest in technologies that differentiate us from the competition. At Albridge, technology isn't an add-on to our business; it is the foundation of our business. And we're committed to doing it better than anyone else."

One of the leading-edge technologies being leveraged at Albridge is virtualization, defined by Pallepati as the ability to automatically repurpose and reallocate computing resources on an as-needed basis. In moving to a virtualized environment, the company also wanted to replace its proprietary RISC/UNIX machines with the x86 architecture running Linux. After evaluating offerings from multiple providers, Albridge chose the Egenera BladeFrame system as its virtualization platform.

"When we started down this path, we knew there were two directions we could take: build it ourselves or source an integrated solution," Pallepati recalls. "We could buy a hundred white boxes and get them working, but we knew the physical complexity and manageability challenges would be overwhelming. Next, we looked at traditional blade servers from the two largest providers and found that, because they're based on a legacy server design, neither of these products can virtualize resources. Alternatively,

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Egenera's diskless blades enable us to repurpose servers in minutes based on application demand, quantifiably improving IT responsiveness to the business."

BladeFrame Benefits

The Egenera BladeFrame has helped Albridge improve competitiveness through technology in several ways, including:

Virtualization: Wealth Reporting is a classic three-tier application with Oracle at the database layer, BEA WebLogic at the application layer, and a customer portal at the Web layer. Since Egenera Processing Blade™ modules are stateless and anonymous, Albridge can run any tier on any blade at any time based on demand. The company also maintains two spare blades in the frame to make failover and incremental capacity immediately available to all three layers.

"With our old equipment every piece of hardware had a fixed identity, locking services and capacity into silos," notes Pallepati. "The Egenera BladeFrame breaks the one application/one server model IT shops have struggled with for years, enabling new levels of agility and utilization."

Availability: "Ensuring that Wealth Reporting is up and running 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, is our number-one priority here in IT," reports Pallepati. "With our client base, we simply cannot have downtime." A fully redundant architecture ensures that Egenera BladeFrame components, both hardware and software, have backups. Likewise, the system safeguards application availability through N+1 hardware failover based on virtualization.

Management: New Jersey-based Albridge houses its Egenera BladeFrame systems with Data Return, a leading provider of managed services for mission-critical applications. As a result, all management is performed remotely. Moreover, Egenera PAN Manager™ software provides a single console for managing all 24 virtual servers in a BladeFrame system. According to Pallepati, managing a single frame rather than dozens of discrete machines has lowered system administration requirements and overall management costs.

Simplicity: Both Albridge and Data Return were impressed by the physical simplicity of the Egenera BladeFrame system, which consolidates redundant connections to power, networks and storage for 24 servers into as few as eight cables. Says Pallepati, "In the time it takes to configure a single legacy server, we've deployed 24 Egenera Processing Blades."

Through virtualization, Egenera has also replaced 80 percent of server hardware components with software, lowering costs and improving reliability by eliminating failure points.

Time to Market: The Egenera BladeFrame is enabling Albridge to get customers up and running faster than ever before. "Deployment for new clients is much simpler now," says Pallepati. "All we do is pop in a blade versus getting the space, buying the hardware, securing it and all the other steps required with legacy systems." Faster time to market means competitive advantage for Albridge clients. Likewise, virtual resources can be shared among clients, improving utilization and lowering costs for both Albridge and its customers.

Savings: Albridge performed a thorough TCO/ROI analysis for each system it considered. While the Egenera BladeFrame's upfront capital cost was higher than that of other platforms, its total cost of ownership—including deployment, management and third-party software expenses—was lower, justifying the investment.

Concludes Pallepati, "Our technology is very important to our clients. Because it can both lower their costs and get their applications to market faster, they specifically want to hear that we're doing virtualization. We've presented our Egenera BladeFrame deployment at several client conferences to a very good response. By staying one step ahead of our competitors, we're able to help our clients do the same. Albridge views the Egenera BladeFrame system as a key contributor to our strategies for both market differentiation and customer delight."



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