

Call center services provider guarantees its SaaS platform at 99.999 percent availability

### Business situation

The list of financial benefits from cloud computing services is long: pay-as-you-go utility model; off-premise IT infrastructure owned and managed by someone else; rapid response to business opportunities or slowdowns without stranding investments. These benefits are tempered, however, by concerns over uptime reliability and data security, which are reinforced with troubling frequency by news headlines chronicling hours-long service outages and worse.

Yet USAN, a provider of hosted call center services to telecommunications companies and large enterprises for the past 20 years, guarantees its software as a service (SaaS) platform at 99.999 percent availability. Customers with stringent uptime requirements and regulatory obligations rely on Norcross, Georgia-based USAN for dependable access to advanced CRM services such as interactive voice response (IVR), automated outbound calling and automated call distribution (ACD). Enhancing its already robust network infrastructure with virtualization technology is a natural evolution in USAN's ability to increase efficiency, flexibility,

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### Rocky Livingston

Chief Information Officer  
USAN

### Quick Facts

#### Solution profile

- ➔ Stratus ftServer systems reside at application layer of a completely redundant IT infrastructure.
- ➔ SLA commitments for system availability between 99.99 and 99.999 percent, depending on the client.
- ➔ "Lockstep" processing reduces management overhead for maintaining system availability.

#### Products

- ➔ Stratus® ftServer® fault-tolerant servers
- ➔ Red Hat® Enterprise Linux

#### Services

- ➔ Assured Availability Plus<sup>SM</sup> service

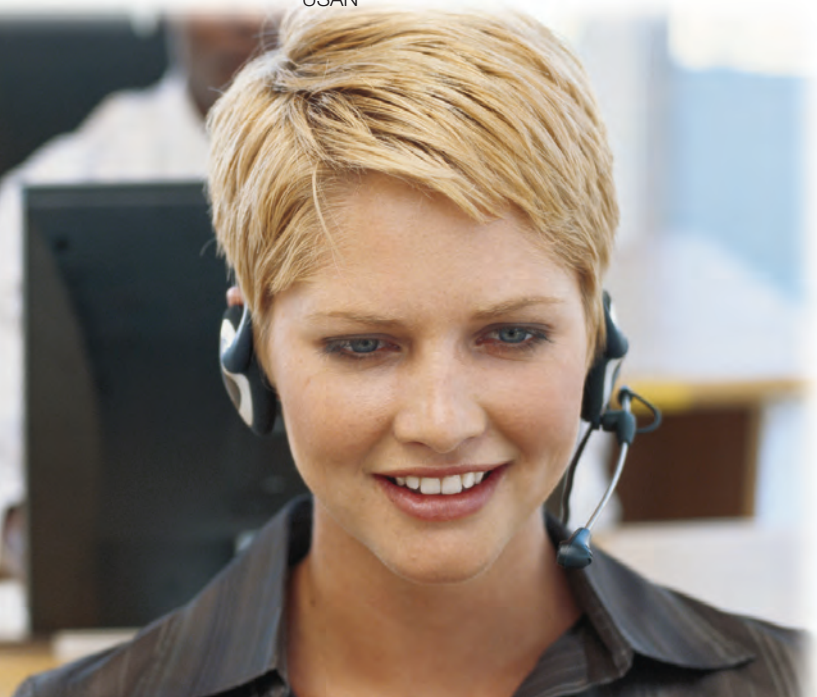
cost management, responsiveness and market growth by supplying core application services to its customers.

Whether it's called cloud services or outsourcing, clients expect rock-solid reliability from applications that reside outside their own IT departments. "For most of our clients, downtime tolerance is essentially zero," said Harry Miller, USAN's senior vice president of business development and marketing. "If they have an interactive voice response system, for example, their customers expect it to be available 24x7. Everyone wants continuous application availability in their call centers. They can't afford to have agents sitting idle because the call routing application is down. We host all applications for one of the country's largest banks, so they require a secure infrastructure for PCI compliance audits."

### Business objectives

The economy has accelerated many companies' willingness to outsource applications to control costs and gain flexibility. Despite perceived risks, even critical applications are becoming candidates for the cloud. That's a huge growth opportunity for USAN, providing it can meet prospective clients' needs – application availability prominent among them. Prospects often send USAN requests for proposals (RFPs) that specify "high availability." They seldom define what high availability means, but USAN has interpreted it to mean at least "four nines" of availability achieved through a 100 percent redundant IT infrastructure.

Count On Stratus™



“All of our clients expect us to provide carrier-grade service; after all, telephone companies are our biggest customers,” Miller said. “When the RFPs say ‘high availability,’ what they’re really asking for is redundancy. They don’t want any single thing — or two things — to knock out their customer service infrastructures.”

#### **Stratus solution: redundancy at the application layer**

USAN has built an IT infrastructure that provides “five nines” of availability — five minutes of unscheduled downtime per year — through full redundancy at every level. It maintains as many as four links with each of its network service providers to ensure connectivity with clients; provisions 25 percent more CPU cycles than it expects to use; provisions two serving nodes for every application, and maintains completely redundant disaster recovery sites at geographically dispersed sites. USAN hosts many of its most critical applications on Stratus fault-tolerant ftServer systems to ensure 99.999 percent uptime.

“Stratus is concentrated at the application server layer,” said Rocky Livingston, USAN’s chief information officer. “Our clients need their applications to be constantly available. A network gateway can go down and that’s one small area of the network out of service. But if the application goes down, it takes the whole system down with it, so we have to ensure that doesn’t happen”

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A stable application layer built on Stratus ftServer systems gives USAN a bullet-proof foundation for offering additional services through a virtualized infrastructure. Within every ftServer system, redundant hardware components run in continuous lockstep — processing the same instructions in perfect synchronization. Should a component fail, its duplicate simply continues to operate — without any downtime or degradation in performance. As a result, vital applications are protected from interruptions in processing and data

collection. Even in-flight data not yet written to disk is fully protected against corruption or loss. The ftServer system’s lockstep technology is key to USAN ability to meet service level agreements (SLAs) that mandate minimal unplanned downtime. Their redundant architecture also helps USAN perform planned maintenance and upgrade procedures without taking down the system.

#### **Business impact**

USAN is building on its strength in telecommunications, finance and health care to expand into more vertical enterprise markets and new geographies, including Asia / PAC and Europe. To support its growth, the company has broadened its product set to meet the needs of any contact center, including IP/PBX, automated call distribution (ACD), predictive dialing, workforce management, quality and performance management, e-Learning, and business process transformation.

USAN’s ability to provide 99.999 percent system availability is a major factor in its ability to attract new customers and retain existing customers. Deploying ftServer systems at the application level helps the company meet SLAs that often call for financial penalties if USAN’s system availability drops below four or five nines.

“Could we meet SLAs without fault-tolerant hardware? Yes or no, depending on the definition of availability. Can we do full lockstep, five nines availability without fault tolerance? It’s possible, but very difficult. Stratus makes it easy, so it’s one less thing we have to worry about,” Livingston said. “I can’t recall ever having unplanned downtime on any of our Stratus products, and we’ve been using them for more than 10 years.”

#### **About Stratus**

Stratus Technologies focuses exclusively on helping its customers keep critical business operations online without interruption. Business continuity requires resiliency and superior availability throughout the IT infrastructure, including virtual environments. Stratus delivers a range of solutions that includes software-based high availability, fault-tolerant servers, availability consulting and assessment, and remote systems management services. Based on its 30 years of expertise in product and services technology for total availability, Stratus is a trusted solutions provider to customers in manufacturing, health care, financial services, public safety, transportation & logistics, and other industries. For more information, visit [www.stratus.com](http://www.stratus.com).

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