

Columbus Data Services

Customers Count on Stratus

ATM/EFT service provider counts on S1 and Stratus, weathers the storm



As a capable ATM/EFT service provider, Columbus Data Services has experience in contingency planning. So when Hurricane Katrina threatened the Gulf Coast in August 2005, staff members at CDS followed well-practiced procedures that would enable the company to continue serving customers from its Dallas disaster recovery center if its operations in New Orleans were disrupted. The company would find its attention to business continuity planning essential in the days that followed – to a much different extent than in past storms. And CDS would realize an unexpected dividend from a recent decision to move its S1 Postilion® solution onto a Stratus® ftServer® system.

“It’s not just the product; it’s the people behind it. Our experience with S1 and Stratus has proven how true this is.”

Ron Schuldt
President
Columbus Data Services

CDS provides small to mid-size financial institutions and ATM deployers a single source for their entire ATM program requirements, including transaction-processing services. The need to sustain continuous service for some 18,000 independently owned ATMs – and growing transaction volumes – was behind the company’s decision to move its Postilion software off a two-server cluster and onto a Stratus ftServer W Series system.

The company had recently acted on S1 Corporation’s recommendation to make the fault-tolerant ftServer system their server of choice for maintaining the high uptime levels required, in a standard Microsoft® Windows® operating system environment. The Stratus server’s built-in component redundancy yielded a sought-after advantage: protection for 99.999% or higher availability without the overhead of managing two separate servers in the primary data center. The server fit smoothly with the EMC disk array in use for database storage. And with the server’s cost-effective, high-performance Intel® Xeon® processor, plus headroom in memory and I/O, the ftServer model that CDS chose offered horsepower and capacity for the future.

Put to the test

About a week after a smooth and uneventful migration onto the ftServer system, a chain of events that started with Hurricane Katrina would put Stratus Technologies and its server to the test.

CDS’ operations rode through the storm flawlessly. The company had been able to continue running transaction processing in New Orleans remotely from its Dallas disaster recovery site; a generator provided electricity after public utilities could no longer operate. But after the levee broke and New Orleans flooded, it became obvious this was no typical recovery scenario lasting only a few days.

Count On Stratus™

A yellow curved line graphic underlining the word "Stratus" in the logo.

According to Ron Schuldt, president of CDS, "Our generator had the fuel to provide 14 days of power. We survived the storm, but after the flood we did not want to risk literally running out of gas. We staged an orderly cutover from New Orleans to Dallas in the middle of the night two days after the storm had passed. Most of our customers were unaware of any change."

"Unlike other companies in the city, our business could not tolerate the possibility of being down for days. We are a 24/7/365 operation," adds Toby Salsman, the firm's vice president of IT. "As a processing company, even being down a few hours is catastrophic. Days would be fatal."

Teamwork for reliability

At the same time, S1 and Stratus had contacted CDS to offer help. With the recently installed ftServer system stranded in New Orleans for the foreseeable future (authorities prohibited travel to the city), Stratus shipped a loaner ftServer system overnight to Dallas so that redundancy could be restored to CDS' transaction processing as soon as possible. As new Stratus customers, CDS management was pleasantly surprised at the

cooperative support being extended – a proactive response above and beyond any contractual obligation or service agreement.

"It's not just the product; it's the people behind it. Our experience with S1 and Stratus has proven how true this is," notes Schuldt.

Salsman agrees. "Stratus treats our relationship with them like a business partner would, doing more than a server vendor. They worked with us to restore server redundancy as soon as possible. They asked, 'What can we do? How can we help?'"

CDS' staff had much to cope with in the unprecedented events following Katrina. Some went without sleep to make sure everything kept going properly. Under the intense pressure, the ease of deploying and managing ftServer systems proved its worth to the team. Salsman prepared for the arrival of the loaner ftServer system so that Postilion production could be cut over rapidly to the fault-tolerant server once the database was copied over, a process that took only about 40 minutes.

The commitment of S1 and Stratus was evident throughout this stressful time that lasted many weeks. For example, to assist with IT coverage when authorities permitted Salsman to retrieve items from his home in New Orleans, S1 sent one of their top technical professionals to CDS' site in Dallas.

Trustworthy in any conditions

The dedication that S1 and Stratus Technologies showed during the period mirrors the "strong customer support and responsiveness" with which Columbus Data Services serves its clients. The way that S1 and Stratus rallied in extreme circumstances inspires CDS to trust that their software and hardware providers can be relied upon during everyday challenges.

Impressed by the value the companies place on customer relationships and the performance of their products, CDS is adding a second Stratus ftServer system to run the S1 Postilion application for disaster recovery purposes. In the ATM/EFT world, a careful continuity plan that anticipates the unexpected is a necessary part of the business.

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Toby Salsman
Vice President of IT
Columbus Data Services

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