

Blue Label Telecoms Moves Up to Tintri VMstore Systems



Tintri Enables South African Distributor of Virtual and Physical Pre-Paid Airtime and Telephony Products to Speed Transactions and Simplify IT Management

www.bluelabeltelecoms.co.za

Industry

- Financial services for telecom customers

Geography

- Johannesburg, South Africa

Virtualization environment

- VMware vSphere
- Traditional storage: Legacy SAN systems

VM profile

- database applications

Key challenges

- Legacy SAN environment was difficult to manage and provided insufficient I/O for business-critical transactional systems.

Tintri solution

- Tintri VMstore hybrid-flash systems

Primary use case

- transactional databases supporting a range of virtual and physical pre-paid airtime and telephony products

Business benefits

- Eliminated daily storage management and the need to hire storage specialists
- Obtained an 8x reduction in datacenter footprint and power
- Improved disaster recovery capabilities

Company

Through its local footprint of touch points which extend to the foremost retailers, petroleum forecourts, independent retailers, and wholesalers in South Africa—Blue Label Telecoms has evolved into a super distributor of virtual and physical prepaid electricity, airtime, and telephony products for mobile and fixed line telecoms operators. “We are a distributor of ‘electronic tokens of value’,” explained Andrew Murray, Group CIO of Blue Label Telecoms. “We also provide online event ticketing and many other virtual transactional services for the South African market.”

IT Challenges

Prior to purchasing its first Tintri systems in 2013, Blue Label Telecoms was using a SAN storage solution from another vendor. “We were struggling with the complexity of the legacy SAN solution,” said Jonathan Trope, Blue Label Telecom’s SA Distribution CIO. “Our environment was not 100% virtualized yet, and we were running out of capacity. Our IT goals for the upcoming year included fully virtualizing our production site, and upgrading our existing SAN to a faster, more efficient, and easier to use storage solution.”

All of Blue Label Telecoms’ database transactions are initiated from company-owned devices in the field, or from direct integrations between the company’s backend systems with local retailers and other corporate clients, including several large financial services companies. With a transactional-based business model, high performance and reliability were also key criteria for choosing the new storage solution.

Moving to Tintri

Blue Label Telecoms was one of the first companies in South Africa to adopt Tintri’s VM- and application-aware SAN solution. “We did look at several other storage solutions, including some of the newer options from our existing vendor, but we didn’t think that any of them were a good fit for our environment,” explained Murray. “Luckily, EOH, one of Tintri’s local partners, approached us and suggested we look at the VMstore systems.”

“With Tintri, we don't have to constantly wonder if our SAN is going to fail anymore—it's a rock-solid product.”

Andrew Murray, Group CIO – Blue Label Telecoms

EOH provided Blue Label Telecoms with a VMstore system for proof of concept (PoC) testing. “As one of the leading technology service providers across all major industry verticals in South Africa, we're always looking to work with the most innovative and agile products available,” stated Michael Leong, Enterprise Account Manager at EOH. “As a forward-thinking vendor, Tintri helps us deliver the best solutions in order to match our customers' business requirements.”

“We've never been overly concerned about trying out new technologies—as long as the business case stacks up,” added Murray. “We liked Tintri's ease of use, speed, and built-in interoperability with VMware. Based on the technical specifications and marketing materials we read, along with the opinions of EOH and several experts in the field, we decided to give Tintri a trial run. We were immediately impressed with Tintri's ease of use and high performance. We knew it would be a great solution for our fast-growing business.”

Blue Label Telecoms purchased its first three Tintri systems in 2013. They added two hybrid flash systems for the company's production and DR sites in 2016, and an additional system for its operational center in Mexico City. Blue Label Telecoms is now running all of its transactional workloads on the six Tintri systems. “Tintri has significantly increased the I/O for all of our key databases,” Murray said.

Simplified Management

Blue Label's IT team had been using the previous vendor's management platform for the legacy environment. “There was a lot of advertised functionality with that management solution, but we were never able to get it working optimally—even when we got help from the vendor,” admitted Trope. “As a result, we ended up just using the bare minimum functionality.”

Storage management is much simpler on the Tintri platform, according to Trope. “By moving to Tintri, we went from having to work on the SAN solution daily, to the point where we can almost forget about our storage systems. Tintri just works flawlessly in the background. It was very simple to configure, and the platform is extremely reliable.”

“The introduction of Tintri Global Center was also quite helpful,” added Murray. “Being able to manage and track capacity usage across all six of our Tintri VMstore systems—including the one in Mexico—using a single interface, has added to our time-savings.”

Eliminating the Need for Storage Specialists

Blue Label Telecom employs a team of six IT engineers for its server, storage, networking, and virtualization environment. “All of our team members are multidisciplinary engineers, not just storage specialists,” explained Murray. “They must be proficient in multiple areas, including VMware and Tintri. Tintri is not a complicated solution to use. The fact that all of our engineers are proficient using the Tintri backend—as well as a host of other technologies—is one of the appealing things about the Tintri platform. It's an excellent solution for any company with a small IT team.”

“Having a solution that's as simple as Tintri is very important for the South African market,” added Trope. “There's definitely a shortage of technology specialists in our region. When you don't have to rely on highly skilled individuals to run your SAN, life is a lot easier as an IT manager.”

Smaller Footprint and More Room for DR

Tintri has also enabled Blue Label Telecoms to reduce its datacenter footprint, while simultaneously gaining additional capacity for disaster recovery. “We went from 96u of our legacy SAN infrastructure, to just 12u with Tintri,” Trope said. “We were able to reduce our power and cooling requirements by 8x as well. With the space-efficient Tintri systems, we now have extra capacity for our DR site.”

Future Plans

Blue Label Telecoms is now evaluating additional use cases for its Tintri systems. “We would love to deploy virtual desktops to all of our internal users within the next 12-18 months,” Trope said. “Tintri is an excellent platform for VDI and would be a great choice for this project.”

“Our Tintri partner EOH occasionally asks us to serve as a Tintri reference when they're engaging with new prospects,” concluded Murray. “I have no hesitation in recommending the Tintri VMstore systems. It takes very little effort to manage the solution, it provides great performance, and it's a very reliable platform. With Tintri, we don't have to constantly wonder if our SAN is going to fail anymore—it's a rock-solid product.”

