



## COMPELLENT SAN PROMOTES VIRTUALIZED STORAGE FOR GEM GROUP



A picture can say a thousand words, and a simple logo can control the perception of an entire brand, with the potential to make—or break—a company’s image. The GEM Group, a full service promotional products distributor, helps organizations make their mark. The company imports promotional products and imprints corporate logos—from backpacks to flashlights, coolers,

and luggage scales—for a large client list that includes software companies, luxury car manufacturers, and hotel chains.

With headquarters in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and another office in southern China, The GEM Group relies on state-of-the-art technology to provide first-class customer service. The IT operations group has recently implemented a media bank digital asset management system and new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that replicates across both the U.S. and China offices. The media bank manages and stores thousands of logos and artwork for customers. With a fast turnaround reputation to uphold, staff can respond quickly to clients’ needs—no matter where they do business. To support these mission-critical systems, the IT department selected the Compellent® Storage Center™ storage area network (SAN) for its high performance, reliability, and cost-effectiveness.

### COMPELLENT DELIVERS iSCSI, EASE OF USE AND PERFORMANCE

When technology manager, Brian Smith, began noticing performance issues with the company’s previous SAN, he realized it was time to start looking for a next-generation storage system. As he evaluated storage technologies from several leading vendors, Compellent stood out as the right fit.

“We have a small team for operations and we all wear different hats, so after performance, ease of use was a primary consideration,” Smith explains. “Compellent really understands both iSCSI and Fibre Channel. When we combined the flexibility and cost-effectiveness of features such as Thin Provisioning and Automated Tiered Storage, the decision to go with Compellent was easy. None of the other solutions came anywhere close to the ease of management and advanced functionality of the Compellent system.”

The GEM Group now has two Compellent SANs, each configured with four dual-port iSCSI cards and active/active 1 Gb controllers. The iSCSI configuration delivers 2 Gb speed and rich functionality that simplifies system management. “Compellent has exceeded my expectations in iSCSI performance,” he says. “During testing, I could take down a whole



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Technology Manager  
The GEM Group

### RESULTS REPORTED BY THE GEM GROUP

- » Virtualized server environment optimizes storage usage ensuring high availability
- » Ease of use cuts time spent provisioning new servers in half
- » Boot from SAN helps ensure business continuity while lowering disk costs on new server purchases
- » Thin Replication reduces restore time from eight hours to nearly 30 minutes on mission-critical systems
- » Automated Tiered Storage increases system efficiency fivefold
- » iSCSI support takes advantage of existing team skill set while offering hardware cost savings

### OPERATING SYSTEMS

- » Microsoft Windows

### KEY APPLICATIONS

- » Microsoft Active Directory
- » VMware
- » IFS integrated ERP System
- » Digital Media Asset Management System

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## WORKING WITH VMWARE

Virtualizing the data center has never been easier or more feasible. The Compellent SAN simplifies integration with VMware ESX Server using advanced storage virtualization, vmfs and raw device mapping, and intuitive wizards to consolidate and share resources, establish test and development environments, and create and store space-efficient snapshots.

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iSCSI switch and the system automatically rerouted traffic. That kind of performance and reliability is way ahead of the curve.”

## VIRTUALIZATION PROVIDES FLEXIBILITY AND SAVINGS

Smith and his team are also using Compellent’s advanced storage virtualization with VMware® server virtualization software. They now have 55 physical servers and 25 virtual servers set up to automatically balance load without service interruption. This helps ensure the level of high availability that is important to the company’s mission-critical systems. Should a VMware® host server fail, combining server and storage virtualization with Compellent Boot from SAN function enables automatic recovery. In the case of standalone physical servers, The GEM Group can simply point a standby server to the LUN and reboot. This flexibility allows them to quickly keep up with performance demands. And Smith has already noticed cost savings. “Boot from SAN provides the versatility needed to keep us up and running, and we save more than disk costs—we save on having to size the server hardware. Now we’re spending a lot less on servers in general and can make better use of the space we have.”

Compellent’s Thin Replication to a secondary site in this virtualized environment helps The GEM Group ensure a highly available system. “Compellent replication means that if we have a problem in the main data center, we can quickly restore that volume without having to go through a lengthy process,” Smith says. “And since we replicate onto a slower tier, we have the assurance of redundancy at a reduced cost.” Compellent’s Thin Replication combined with server virtualization has reduced remote recovery times from days or hours down to nearly 30 minutes.

## RICH FUNCTIONALITY CUTS MANAGEMENT TIME IN HALF

In addition, Compellent’s Thin Provisioning enables flexible growth without having to reprovision systems later or buy excess storage. Smith’s staff can easily overallocate

servers and monitor actual utilization. As a result, Smith is only buying new disks when really necessary. In addition, provisioning new storage with Compellent is quick and easy. “Allocating and connecting new storage to a server used to take at least an hour,” Smith says. “Now it takes maybe 30 minutes, mostly to install and configuring the server.”

Compellent’s Automated Tiered Storage to improve storage utilization and performance. Currently, The GEM Group uses two tiers, automatically moving data that is used less frequently to less expensive storage. “The Compellent SAN is about five times more efficient than our previous SAN,” Smith explains. “Not only does it offer multiple physical tiers, but within those tiers we have multiple RAID levels. And it’s all automatic—that gives us the best of all worlds: quick access for users, reduced storage costs, and automated data performance tuning on the fly.”

For improved system visibility and reporting, The GEM Group uses Compellent’s Enterprise Manager to help plan future storage requirements and Compellent Copilot Services helps Smith’s team stay on top of system performance and upgrades. “I know I can depend on the Compellent support team to be here if needed,” Smith says. “Plus they have very strong local user group meetings twice a year where people share unique approaches and success stories. Those meetings provide invaluable networking and information that helps support our storage growth.”

The Compellent SAN has allowed The GEM Group to improve performance, achieve high availability, and meet disaster recovery goals. This translates into the ability to keep ahead of business growth demands with a flexible storage environment that can evolve to meet changing business needs. “Thanks to Compellent, storage has become a highly effective tool that sits in the background and does exactly what it’s supposed to do, without too much manipulation,” Smith explains. “We haven’t needed to hire additional IT staff and the system’s ease of management gives us all more time to focus on higher value, business-focused projects.”