

Claims Management Company Makes 10-Year SAN Investment

Customer Case Study



Crawford & Company ramps SAN performance and longevity with Cisco MDS 9710 Multilayer Directors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name:

Crawford & Company

Location: Atlanta, GA

Business Challenge:

- Improve SAN switching resiliency and performance
- Support future requirements, including scaling capacity, growing VMs, and potential move to FCoE
- Minimize migration risk and effort

Network Solution:

- Cisco MDS 9710 Multilayer Directors
- Cisco Nexus 5000 Series Switches
- Cisco Prime Data Center Network Management

Business Results:

- Gained 16-Gbps switch capacity for high SAN performance
- Minimized migration risk with Cisco MDS 9710 smart zone and ISL features
- Gained built-in FCoE capabilities, IBM mainframe readiness

Business Challenge

Crawford & Company is the world's largest independent provider of claims management solutions. It serves risk management and insurance clients in more than 70 countries, providing claims, process outsourcing, and consulting services for property and casualty, workers compensation, and legal settlement administration product lines.

Crawford's work relies on high volumes of data analysis, much of which involves sensitive information. Its data warehouse contains 500 TBs—and growing—with heavy host processing demands. IBM mainframe systems provide much of the processing power, and host servers handle the rest. And because of compliance requirements, most data traffic is encrypted. These requirements were compelling reasons for Crawford's IT team to make some changes in the data center infrastructure. High I/O requirements had created significant congestion in the existing 192-port SAN switches, which also were experiencing numerous failures due to their age. Crawford IT is also migrating its older Windows systems to virtual machines (VMs), growing its virtualized infrastructure to more than 500 VMs.

Crawford needed new switches with better resiliency and scalability to accommodate future plans. Server hosts are currently performing encryption tasks, but the team plans to migrate to new storage arrays that will handle the encryption instead. This fact, combined with the desire to move toward implementing Fibre Channel over Ethernet (FCoE) to simplify cabling, meant that new switches would have to provide a lot of flexibility. And they would have to be relatively easy to migrate to minimize risk.

"We considered several options, but return on investment is important," says John Praet, principal storage architect. "We wanted a 10-year product with the ability to adapt as our demands grow. That's why we chose the Cisco MDS 9710 Multilayer Directors to create our new collapsed core SAN architecture."



“The Cisco MDS 9000 Series of products has been extremely stable and consistent over 10 years. We’re confident that the MDS 9710 systems will deliver similar longevity and return on investment—with a lot of flexibility.”

John Praet
Principal Storage Architect



Network Solution

Crawford had recently purchased Cisco Nexus® 5000 Series Switches to increase LAN switching redundancy. Cisco® Nexus 5000 Series Switches are designed to deliver high-density top-of-rack Layer 2 and Layer 3 switching with unified ports in compact one- and two-rack-unit form factors. They support Gigabit, 10 Gigabit, and 40 Gigabit Ethernet, and native Fibre Channel and FCoE connectivity, which gave Crawford lots of options.

With Cisco MDS 9710 Multilayer Directors, Crawford got a SAN switch designed for large-scale storage networks. The Cisco MDS 9710 layers a comprehensive set of intelligent features on a high-performance, protocol-independent switch fabric for uncompromising high availability, scalability, and transparent integration of new technologies. Crawford will eliminate its congestion with 16-Gbps line-rate, nonblocking, predictable performance across all traffic conditions for every port in the chassis. The Cisco MDS 9710 is VM-friendly, enabling VMs to have the same SAN attributes as physical servers. The Cisco MDS 9710 also is mainframe-ready, with full support for IBM System z FICON and Linux environments.

“The Cisco MDS 9000 Series of products has been extremely stable and consistent over 10 years,” says Praet. “We’re confident that the MDS 9710 systems will deliver similar longevity and return on investment—with a lot of flexibility.”

Crawford also implemented Cisco Prime™ Data Center Network Manager (DCNM), which combined the IT team’s LAN and SAN management into a single pane of glass.

“Cisco DCNM let us take management to the next level,” says Praet. “With the Cisco Nexus and MDS 9710s, we can view our complete networked world, which really made it easier for the team members who have management privileges. We can see much deeper into our SAN environment than we could before and solve any emerging problems faster.” The team especially likes the GUI interface for configuring ports and the visual dashboard. Generating reports is much simpler than in the past.

Business Results

For Praet and his team, migrating to the new Cisco MDS switches was surprisingly easy. With the switches’ built-in Inter-Switch Links (ISLs) and smart zoning capability, the team simply created one hop, and the new primary switch (Cisco MDS 9710) automatically assumed control of existing zones. All the team had to do was to unplug the hosts from the old switches and plug them into the new switches. This process took less than a day. Competitive switches that Crawford had initially considered would have required a significant amount of integration work and taken much longer to migrate.

“With the Cisco Nexus and MDS 9710s, we also got SAN FCoE capabilities at virtually no extra cost,” says Praet. “When we decide to move to FCoE, the capabilities are already there, and we can also reduce our fiber cabling footprint for our VM environment.” FCoE would let IT reduce the cabling to its core switches and VM environment. This capability, in turn, would free ports for tape backup or data replication. The competitive switch would have required an additional chassis, higher costs, and a steep learning curve for the team. Once again, the Cisco SAN solution delivers more options for the future.

“The solutions were easy to install, and support from Cisco is excellent,” says Praet. “Even though I have to say—we haven’t had any problems.”

PRODUCT LIST

- Cisco MDS 9710 Multilayer Directors
- Cisco Nexus 5000 Series Switches
- Cisco Prime Data Center Network Management

Next Steps

Crawford is currently evaluating new solid-state storage arrays. If the company moves to solid state, Crawford IT can easily increase SAN switching capacity without having to buy another chassis. At that time, Praet also expects to explore additional Cisco MDS features, such as Data Mobility Manager and I/O Accelerator.

“We’re very happy with the product,” he says. “Scalability by module and feature is a great thing.”

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Multilayer Director Switches, visit <http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/ps5990/index.html>.

For more information about Crawford and Company, visit <http://us.crawfordandcompany.com>.

This customer story is based on information provided by Crawford and Company and describes how that particular organization benefits from the deployment of Cisco products. Many factors may have contributed to the results and benefits described; Cisco does not guarantee comparable results elsewhere.

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