scalar

Mountain Equipment Co-op Improves Performance with Nimble Storage Adaptive Flash Platform

Outdoor retail co-operative, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), exists to encourage and inspire Canadians to live active outdoor lifestyles.

📅	Mountain Equipment Co-op
📍	Vancouver, BC
💼	Retail

Objective

Improve performance metrics for key reports run from the BI data warehouse, faster target for the SQL database, and run a proof of concept designed to test all-flash versus a hybrid array storage solution.

Highlights — Technology Used

- Query time for key report drops from 45 minutes to 7 minutes.
- Smooth integration with the VMware environment.

Our Approach

Outdoor retail co-operative, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), exists to encourage and inspire Canadians to live active outdoor lifestyles. The co-operative is known for selling high-quality, well-designed products to outdoor enthusiasts. MEC has more than 4 million members across Canada, whom it serves through 18 stores in 6 provinces, and through its online store and app. After users of the company's business intelligence (BI) system complained about slow performance, MEC's IT team was tasked with improving the run time for key reports.

Slow Business Intelligence System Affects Key Reports

The growing flood of data has all retailers wrestling with overwhelming amounts of customer information. Business intelligence tools help retail organizations make sense of the data and better understand their customer base. Data accessibility and real-time business analytics are increasingly important, helping businesses react to opportunities and make decisions quicker. MEC had set up a BI data warehouse and although the system was helping them perform tasks much faster than previous processes, there was still plenty of room for improvement. "The business users were telling us that reports were taking long periods of time to run. In particular, we had one key report that was taking 45 minutes to complete," said David Greekas, Manager of IT Infrastructure at MEC. "My team was tasked with improving system performance for our users."

They felt it was important to run a proof of concept (POC) project to ensure the solution they selected delivered the performance improvements they were looking for. Raw throughput was the primary issue – disc activity was not high throughout the day, but MEC needs close to real-time reporting, which requires instantaneous raw throughput. In addition to the speed requirement, integration with their existing storage network solution and VMware support were critical.

Using speed as their benchmark for success, the IT team set about researching all-flash storage vendors that could meet their requirements. An all-flash array is a storage device that densely packs large amounts of flash media and is known to be much faster than legacy storage solutions, but at a steeper price point. Alternatively, hybrid solutions add a thin slice of flash storage to the array, helping to eliminate the tradeoff between flash performance and cost efficiency.

"We were initially resistant to looking at Nimble's hybrid flash platform because we were concerned that caching would not work, but we liked what we heard and decided to test them out," said Greekas. "We shortlisted Nimble and two other all-flash vendors and asked Scalar to take an unconventional approach and represent two of the vendors, which they agreed to do in a transparent and unbiased way," he continued.

> "During the testing process, Scalar and the vendors they represented were incredibly cooperative, and Nimble stood out. They were committed to working with us to make it fast and helped us configure the solution to work with our VMware environment."
>
> **David Greekas**
> MANAGER OF IT INFRASTRUCTURE, MEC

Mountain Equipment Co-op is known for selling high-quality, well-designed products to outdoor enthusiasts and boasts over 4 million members nationwide.

Solution

The Nimble CS500 was the best performing solution in key tests that were critical to MEC. "During the testing process, Scalar and the vendors they represented were incredibly cooperative, and Nimble stood out. They were committed to working with us to make it fast and helped us configure the solution to work with our VMware environment," said Greekas.

Outcome

A Productivity Win for the Business

> "We took a 45 minute query down to 7 minutes. It was a substantial productivity win for the business," said Greekas. "Now instead of running a report once a day, that same report can easily run multiple times daily to get up to date information."

Objectives Met

Query time for key reports drops from 45 minutes to 7 minutes.

Smooth integration into existing VMware environment.