

CASE STUDY

Hallmark Helps People Connect Digitally With Help From CenturyLink Web Solutions



At a Glance

Company:
Hallmark Cards, Inc.

Summary:
To keep its Web site up during all-important holidays like Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day, Hallmark Digital engaged CenturyLink to provide a broad range of managed infrastructure and professional services to support IT operations. In addition to keeping the Hallmark.com site up during huge traffic spikes experienced during critical business periods, CenturyLink is helping Hallmark stay on the industry leading edge by supporting initiatives to expand upon its line of innovative new digital products and services.



Hallmark is synonymous with the joy of people giving and connecting. Founded nearly a century ago, Hallmark is the world's leading maker of greeting cards and gifts, and is rapidly expanding its reach from traditional paper-based products sold through retail stores — more than 41,500 of them in the United States alone — to innovative digital products like e-cards, customized print-at-home products and other innovative consumer products. Hallmark Digital, the firm's online division, has experienced exponential growth in recent years as consumers increasingly turn to the Web for gift ideas and products.

Business Opportunity

Two years ago, Hallmark began searching for an infrastructure outsourcing vendor to host its growing online operations. "Our top priority was finding a managed services provider that could keep our Web site up during the huge spikes in traffic we'd see during holidays such as Christmas, Mother's Day, and Valentine's Day," said Greg Fay, director of technology at Hallmark Digital. "Being down for even a short period of time during these critical peak periods not only cost us significant revenues, but had the potential to hurt our brand."

Hallmark also needed an IT platform robust and scalable enough to support its forward-looking strategy of introducing a steady stream of innovative new digital products into the marketplace. “We’re currently the brand leader in this market, and we have to keep moving forward to ensure we stay that way,” said Fay.

Indeed, Hallmark has big plans for the digital space, having just formed a new division, Hallmark Digital, that will be responsible for developing new products and services to offer online. “We needed a platform high-performing and scalable enough to grow with this business,” said Fay.

Solution

After performing an extensive evaluation of hosting vendors, Hallmark chose CenturyLink. Hallmark’s reasons: CenturyLink’s state-of-the-art data centers, its ability to provide a full range of managed services other than straight colocation, and — most critically — its superior service level agreements (SLAs) that gave Hallmark rock-solid assurances its sites would stay up even during the highest-volume periods. Today, Hallmark.com depends on CenturyLink for all of its managed hosting needs as well as a

comprehensive bundle of other advanced web solution services including managed network, managed applications, and managed security. Additionally, CenturyLink — through its Professional Services division — has responsibility for supporting Hallmark.com’s infrastructure operations. This includes providing expertise for the infrastructure supporting Hallmark.com’s different operating system and application platforms, as well as storage, backup, security and overall program management services.

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Greg Fay Director of Technology, Hallmark Digital

Benefits

First and foremost, CenturyLink delivered on its promise to keep the Hallmark Web site up even during the sharpest spikes in traffic. CenturyLink delivered five million e-cards in 2009 through Valentine’s Day. “They passed both Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day with flying colors,” said Fay. “We accommodated everyone who visited our site and processed all our transactions without any problems.”

Another major benefit has been transparency into IT operations. “We’d never before had much insight into our environment, which made things difficult from an operational standpoint,” said Cindy Berry, IT architect. “Today, whenever we have a question about any component in our infrastructure, or any aspect of the CenturyLink service, we can either look online or pick up the phone and talk to a live person. And the support we receive is just excellent.”

Hallmark has been so impressed with the services it has received that it commissioned CenturyLink to conduct a CenturyLink Transformation MethodologySM (STM) workshop. STM is CenturyLink’s consultative program for helping companies like Hallmark transform their IT infrastructures to support high-level initiatives and strategies. In Hallmark’s case, CenturyLink helped Hallmark assess its needs for a new Hallmark Digital IT infrastructure, and helped create an architecture that would support it as it broke new ground developing and delivering digital products and services. “CenturyLink brought in a team of 15 senior people who came up with some very innovative and creative solutions,” said Fay. “The workshop helped us to identify, understand, and solve our challenges.”

Hallmark was looking for a true business ally, said Fay, and it found one in CenturyLink. "We needed a company that could plan with us for the future as well as meet our current needs, and CenturyLink has more than delivered on our expectations,"

said Fay. "We're delighted with CenturyLink, and have highly recommended them to other Hallmark divisions as well as other companies."

Future

Above all, despite being the global market leader, Hallmark is not content to sit upon its laurels. "Hallmark's vision is to help create a more emotionally connected world, and we anticipate that the digital space is going to be critical to our continued success," said Fay. "We're constantly innovating and CenturyLink's ability to support us in all our digital initiatives is essential."

In addition, because technology is changing so fast — almost at exponential rates — CenturyLink is "helping us find ways we can be both more efficient and more cost-effective," said Fay. "We are confident we have found a provider for the long term."

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