



Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003 Customer Solution

Mountaineering Group Decreases Network Administration Costs by 70 percent

Case study

“We are able to maintain and support a very powerful system, without the need for a dedicated IT manager or system administrator.”

Jeffrey Martin

Chief Financial Officer and Operations Manager
Rainier Mountaineering, Inc.

Rainier Mountaineering, Inc. (RMI) and its experienced, highly skilled group of guides is committed to setting the standard for quality climbing instruction. Every day, RMI depends on its network resources to maintain schedules, client information, and staff collaboration, as well as support its retail sales division. As RMI grew, so did the time, resources, and cost needed to keep the infrastructure operational. With the help of U.S. Techs, RMI implemented a Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003 solution that cut network administration costs by 70 percent while improving staff morale through easier access to shared and personal files. Now, RMI has more time and resources to focus its attention on what drives business: serving customers, instead of managing servers.



CUSTOMER PROFILE	BUSINESS SITUATION	SOLUTION	BENEFITS
Rainier Mountaineering, Inc. (RMI) has been helping climbers of all skill levels summit Mt. McKinley in Alaska (the highest peak in North America) and Mt. Rainer in Washington for over three decades. RMI also partners with Summit Haus, a climbing equipment retailer, and Rainier Shuttle service, which transports clients to and from climbing destinations.	RMI's network of 13 desktop computers and three servers was becoming increasingly difficult to manage and use, and network administration costs were soaring. RMI needed a solution that would reduce management and support costs and allow them to focus on new business applications that would improve the flow of business..	Assisted by Microsoft Certified Partner, U.S. Techs, RMI implemented a Microsoft® Windows Small Business Server 2003 solution with Windows® XP operating system, and Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003 running on employee workstations. Its retail partner company, deployed Great Plains Dynamics and Microsoft Retail Management System.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fast system deployment within a matter of days ▪ Decreases network administration-related costs by 70 percent ▪ Improves access to team and personal files ▪ Provides a high level of security



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Forbes Higman

Chief Technology Officer
U.S. Techs

Situation

Rainier Mountaineering, Inc. (RMI) is known for helping mountain climbers of various skill levels tackle some of the highest peaks in North America, Mt. McKinley in Alaska and Mt. Rainier in Washington. Based in Ashford, Washington, at the base of Mt. Rainier, the highest mountain in the Cascades, RMI plans and arranges hundreds of guided expeditions each year. The mountain guides at RMI are among the best in the United States, with each of the 75 guides having years of climbing experience. RMI is one of only a handful of guide services authorized to operate in national parks that surround both Mt. McKinley and Mt. Rainier.

All of RMI's 105 employees' top concerns focus around good climbing techniques and overall climbing safety. Many of the employees at RMI use the available 13 desktop computers to book guides, record customer information, and collaborate with staff on various projects. However, as the existing IT infrastructure became outdated and overused, computer-related issues and problems began to interrupt crucial business processes at RMI and interfere with employee productivity.

Originally, the company had set up a Microsoft® Small Business Server 4.5 server to host a Windows NT® 4 domain. A server running Microsoft Windows® 2000 Server hosted an internal database for its client registration application and Microsoft Business Solutions Great Plains. A Citrix MetaFrame server allowed for remote access to internal applications not available on all workstations.

The network was functional, but demanded a level of management that RMI, alone, could not handle with the resources it had in Ashland. As a result, the necessary network configuration and maintenance procedures required to keep the network

reliable had not been consistently followed. Network storage locations were spread out all over the network making it hard for employees to find, share, and backup important documents. System configurations and overall system health was hard to monitor. Unexpected network problems and, many times, periods of server downtime had become a regular occurrence. “The original configuration had evolved into a workstation-centric network with no true centralized point for management, a configuration that was not the original intention,” explained Forbes Higman, Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of U.S. Techs. “And, with a system so disconnected and difficult to manage, security of sensitive data and the network in general had become a top concern.”

Communication had also become problematic. Seven, disconnected e-mail domains, were used to provide e-mail for RMI employees. Many of these domains were hosted outside of the RMI network by separate hosting companies. Not only was this costly, but difficult to manage. With so many e-mail domains, simple communication problems were hard to diagnose and fix. The Citrix MetaFrame server used for remote access was too difficult to maintain for RMI; only a few employees had access to internal applications from outside the network. Even something as simple as retrieving e-mail from remote locations was not possible for most employees.

Without the extensive in-house technical support it required to tackle its IT issues, RMI relied on various third-party companies to help solve many of its IT problems and, for all intensive purposes, keep the system up and running. Finding and getting support had always been costly for RMI. “We operate in a remote location—it would usually take service people almost two hours to reach us,” says Jeffrey Martin, Chief Financial Officer

(CFO) and Operations Manager of RMI. “Being so far out of the normal service region, many technical support companies could only be onsite for a few hours and had to diagnose and fix the situation within that time span. With support sessions schedules once every four weeks, just keeping the system functional had become extremely costly.”

As RMI hired new employees, it found growing its network to meet the needs of an expanding staff to be difficult, as well. The in-house staff did not have the necessary technological expertise to add and support new users. Employee desktop computers were set up inconsistently, which had resulted in only a few computers having access to all available network resources.

Solution

With the help of Microsoft Certified Partner, U.S. Techs, RMI implemented a solution based on Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003.

U.S. Techs replaced RMI’s existing Small Business Server 4.5 server and the Citrix-based remote access server with one server

running Windows Small Business Server 2003, running Active Directory® directory services. All 13 desktop computers on RMI’s network were upgraded to Microsoft Windows XP Professional and Microsoft Office System. And, to protect the network and its assets, U.S. Techs set up the advanced firewall and the automated back-up system included in Windows Small Business Server 2003.

Group Policies were set up on the new Active Directory domain to standardize mandated workstation configurations that were previously managed manually. Roaming profiles allows employees to log on to any workstation in the network and still have access to their personalized desktop, e-mail, shared files and folders, and printers.

Using the Microsoft Exchange 2000 Server technologies integrated in Windows Small Business Server 2003, U.S. Techs consolidated seven e-mail domains onto a single server running Windows Small Business Server 2003, making it possible for RMI to handle its e-mail through one central location. Integrated remote access capabilities allow RMI employees access to e-mail using Outlook Web Access and

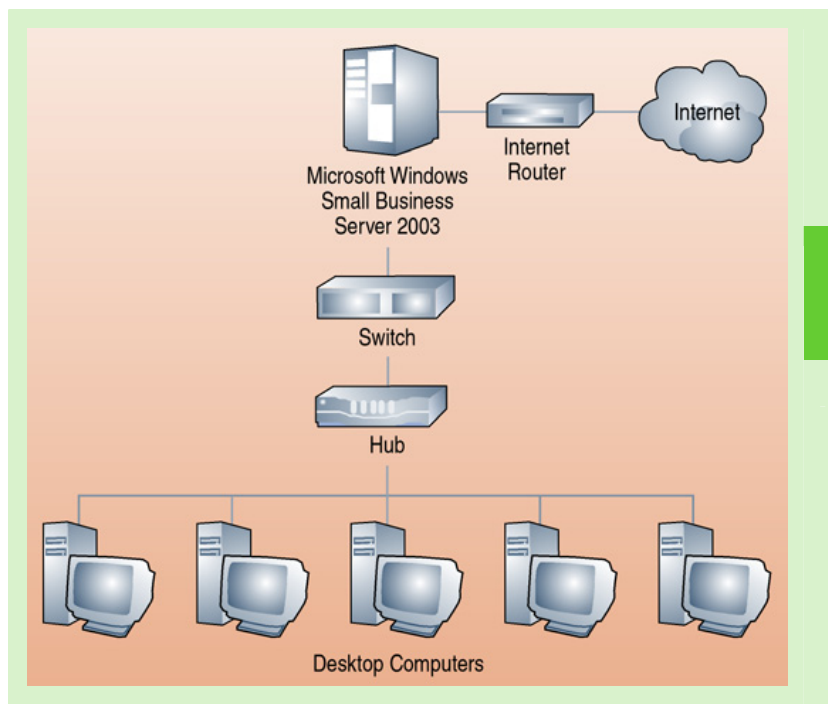


Figure 1: RMI architecture featuring Windows Small Business Server 2003.

"We now have the time to consider exciting features that were either not available to us before or too time consuming and costly to consider with our previous system."

Jeffrey Martin

Chief Financial Officer and Operations Manager
Rainier Mountaineering, Inc.

Microsoft Office Outlook 2003.

Employees have secure access to their workstations and the RMI network through Remote Web Workplace. The Remote Access Support features in Windows Small Business Server 2003 makes it possible for RMI to receive online, technical support.

Windows Small Business Server 2003, gives employees inter-office collaboration and file sharing capabilities that extends far beyond the previous experience with the integrated Windows SharePoint™ Services. In addition to traditional file and print basics, now staff enjoy an out-of-the-box intranet solution providing a shared calendar feature that allows them to track work schedules and important events from any desktop computer.

Summit Haus, a retail partner of RMI, now handles both its online and in-store sales with Microsoft Retail Management System. Point-of-sale computers now have a direct connection to a Microsoft SQL Server 2000 database used to store customer and inventory information.

Benefits

For RMI, the benefits of updating its network to a more reliable system are immediately visible. Windows Small Business Server 2003 has given RMI a stable, easy-to-manage environment that provides a solid base from which the company can effectively handle growth, and plan and implement exciting business solutions. Now, RMI saves not only money on infrastructure, but also has more time and resources to focus its attention on what drives business: serving customers better.

Easy System Deployment

Windows Small Business Server 2003 provides many ways to ease implementation and make it as painless as possible. "Within a matter of days, we had the entire system up and running," says Higman of U.S. Techs. "The migration was

seamless, and we never had to take the system offline or disrupt the flow of business."

To everyone's delight, U.S. Techs discovered that development costs that had normally been associated with this type of implementation could be reduced. Previously, advanced reporting tools that allowed U.S. Techs to monitor system stability and integrity had to be custom scripted. Higman and his team were pleased to find that those tools now were included in the operating system, which saved them a week's worth of development time.

"We didn't have to build any reporting tools. It was just a matter of turning on the existing tools in Windows Small Business Server 2003," says Higman. "Without having to build those reporting tools by hand, we can focus on developing features that add real value to the solution."

Decreased Administration Costs

Windows Small Business Server 2003 provides RMI the centralized, efficient means to handle daily business needs effectively. All of its IT and core business needs can be met using one central server, without having to have complicated hardware and software. Task-based wizards allow RMI staff to deal with complex and time-consuming system administration tasks, like adding and deleting users or performing system updates, instead of having to call upon outsourced technical support. By consolidating seven e-mail domains to one centralized server, RMI has tighter control on corporate communication avenues. "We are able to maintain and support a very powerful system, without the need for a dedicated IT manager or system administrator," says Martin.

"With our previous system, every time something would go wrong, we would have to call a third-party support company to fix our problem," says Martin. "And



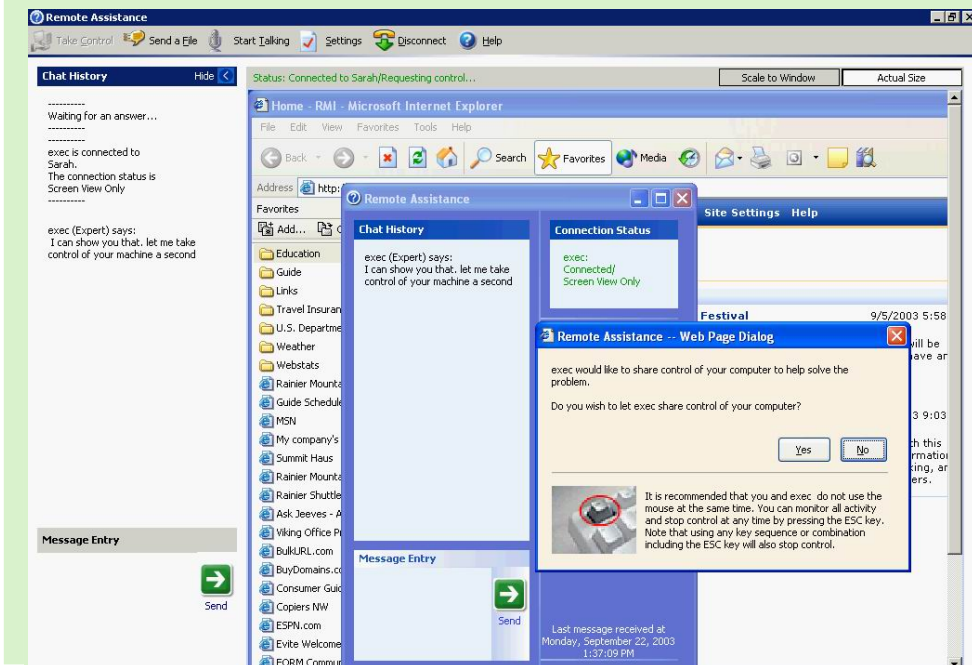


Figure 2. Remote Assistant Support keeps RMI's IT system operational and saves the company a tremendous dollar amount in support costs.

because of our rural location, each visit was very costly, and technicians would have time only to fix the high-priority problems. With support handled remotely and all seven e-mail domains consolidated into one location, we expect to save over 70 percent in network support and administration costs and over \$1,600 each year in domain hosting costs.”

Increased Security

Some of the same features that streamlined administration of the network also contribute to a higher level of security. By upgrading to Windows Small Business Server 2003, RMI data is centralized, protected, and kept current, within a secure network. “With Windows Small Business Server 2003 we’re able to implement top-of-the-line security features like expiring passwords and an advanced network firewall that will help RMI keep its systems secure,” says Higman.

Improved Access to Network Resources

Now, RMI employees can have access to important information any place, anytime, from any device by using features like the Remote Web Workplace and Outlook Web

Access, which are all included in Windows Small Business Server 2003. Employees now share calendars and use Windows SharePoint Services to stay up-to-date with events and share information more quickly and easily than before.

All workstations now have access to Microsoft Office System, which allows access to the internal registration application with Microsoft Office Access 2003. RMI employees can create custom newsletters with Microsoft Office Word 2003 that are sent on a regular basis to RMI customers using Word’s e-mail merge feature and the Exchange Server technology in Windows Small Business Server 2003.

“When a system works correctly, and the need for complicated, hard-to-use system applications has been eliminated, employee moral improves greatly,” says Martin.

“Because of the way our system now works—ensuring that all appropriate features are available to anyone logged on to the network, productivity and general workplace satisfaction has increased. We have been given the opportunity to concentrate on our business again—and

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Forbes Higman
Chief Technology Officer
U.S. Techs

feel confident our infrastructure can support our goals.”

Improved Customer Service

Before the implementation of Microsoft Retail Management System, none of RMI’s core retail business processes were managed with intelligent business software. RMI staff had to rely on manual methods to track sales and inventory, and they were using “unintelligent” Electronic Cash Registers (ECRs) at the point of sale. Now RMI uses Retail Management System at the point-of-sale to enable cashiers to quickly process customer transactions and provide superior customer service. Store managers are also using the program to manage inventory, pricing, supplier information, promotions, customer data and reporting. RMI plans to sign up for card processing with Citibank Merchant Services, which provides integrated debit and credit card processing and competitive rates with Retail Management System, which will add even greater value to their system.

A Foundation for Adding Valuable New Features

Now, RMI can turn its attention towards the future—to programs and features that will improve business processes. “We now

have the time to consider exciting features that were either not available to us before or too time consuming and costly to consider with our previous system,” says Martin.

Future plans include an electronic customer check-in system that will allow the RMI guides to connect to its network using a PDA (or, perhaps, a Microsoft Tablet PC) using a wireless connection. When this is implemented, RMI guides will be able to streamline the check-in process for expeditions by giving guides instant access to customer information and required forms at the check-in point, which currently does not have any type of connection to the RMI network.

“As soon as a customer begins the check-in process for a climb, RMI will be able to look up his or her name and figure out if they have filled out the correct forms they need in order to participate in that climb,” says Higman. “This will save a great deal of time and paperwork for RMI.”

RMI plans to use Windows Small Business Server 2003 as the backbone for all future system features and programs that will help improve worker productivity, allowing RMI to more efficiently run its business.

Windows Small Business Server 2003 helps your small business to be more productive with fewer resources. Now you can:

- Protect your business information automatically in 15 essential ways.
- Get 20 percent more done every day by making it easier for your employees to find, share, communicate, and remotely access information.
- Reach more customers and serve them better, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Set up quickly and easily operate a Windows Server system to run your small business.

For more information about Windows Small Business Server, go to:
<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsserver2003/sbs>

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