



dunnhumby Saves Time, Reduces Costs and Creates a Secure Mixed IT Environment with Vintela Authentication Services

dunnhumby is an international marketing consultancy and services company focused on helping retail brands and organisations dramatically improve their understanding of their customers. With a mixed IT environment, including Unix-based business-critical applications and Microsoft Outlook/Exchange, dunnhumby, like many organisations, was faced with the predicament of how best to manage this diverse environment without putting security at risk.

The Challenge

dunnhumby provides its clients with insight into their customers' behaviour. This process relies heavily on IT, in particular, a bespoke Unix-based database application known as The Shop. Developed by dunnhumby, The Shop is a business intelligence application that analyses and reports on large volumes of data with much of the statistical analysis being performed in SAS, also running on Unix. Around 150 of dunnhumby's clients use The Shop, including Tesco and Kroger, and it has become a key part of dunnhumby's business.

Like most organisations, dunnhumby has a Windows-based infrastructure, and was already using Active Directory (AD) for its 750 users to sign on to Outlook/Exchange e-mail, SQL Server applications, SharePoint applications and other Windows-based in-house applications, running on 85 Windows servers across its U.K. and U.S. operations.

dunnhumby's The Shop application was originally developed to run on Tru64 Unix, due to its ability to efficiently process large non-relational databases containing complex calculations. When HP announced that it would cease to support the Alpha hardware platform used by the company, dunnhumby decided to move to a Linux platform. The new platform would support the high-specification processing required for The Shop, but wouldn't allow a user's password to be shared between all servers. Requiring each of the 360 Linux users to have a different password for each server (about five) would result in a dramatic increase in the time and labour needed to manage these applications. In addition, granting user permissions to provide application access would become significantly more time-consuming and complicated, and would also increase the levels of security required to protect the environment.

Driven by the need to migrate its Unix-based applications to Linux, dunnhumby needed a solution to efficiently and securely manage its mixed IT environment. dunnhumby recognised that AD offered the most elegant solution for providing users with access to both their Windows and Linux applications, and went in search of a suitable solution.

The Quest Solution

Following a survey of the market, dunnhumby narrowed its search to two products, one of which was Vintela Authentication Services from Quest Software. Vintela Authentication Services proved to be the strongest product for a number of reasons.

First, there was no need for dunnhumby to extend their AD schema, since Vintela Authentication Services uses the standard schema available in Active Directory "R2". Using the other product would have required additional extensions, adding unnecessary complexity to dunnhumby's AD environment. Second, Vintela Authentication Services provided a packaged, open-source samba server (a Windows machine for Linux file sharing) and leveraged Windows Group Policy for Linux to deliver an automated machine setting deployment capability. In addition, Vintela Authentication Services provided a powerful command line interface.

Vintela Authentication Services allows organisations to seamlessly extend the security and compliance of their Microsoft Active Directory infrastructure to Unix and Linux platforms and applications. It addresses the compliance need for cross-platform access control and the operational need for centralised authentication and single sign-on. In addition, it enables simplified, heterogeneous identity management.

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— Andy Williams
Infrastructure Architect
dunnhumby



Overview

Headquarters

London, England

Services

Marketing

Critical Needs

A solution to manage a mixed IT environment, enabling single sign-on and access to Linux applications through Active Directory.

Solution

Vintela Authentication Services

Results

- Achieved time and cost savings by not needing to spend additional resource resetting passwords and creating multiple accounts
- Achieved up to six hours of time savings per week through reduced administration and maintenance of user accounts and permissions
- Reduced risk of security breach
- Removed the need for separate Windows and Unix support teams for account management
- Expects to achieve ROI within 12 months

"Another factor in our decision to invest in Vintela Authentication Services was that Quest is an established organisation, and we felt confident in its ability to provide a solid customer support service," noted Andy Williams, infrastructure architect at dunnhumby.

With a day and a half of consultancy from Quest, dunnhumby's installation of Vintela Authentication Services went well. "We were pleasantly surprised that it installed so smoothly, and have globally rolled out the solution to around 50 Linux servers, in line with the Linux migration," explained Williams.

"We are 100 percent happy with the support service that we've had from Quest; all of our calls to the support team were dealt with swiftly and professionally," added Williams. "We've also been impressed by how much Quest product management has listened to our suggestions for future direction with Vintela Authentication Services."

The Bottom Line

By introducing Vintela Authentication Services during its move to Linux, dunnhumby has saved itself approximately 45 man-hours of account maintenance each week. "With our eight Unix servers, we had the ability to create three clusters, which took around three hours per week to maintain," explained Williams. "With our 45 to 50 Linux servers, there was no ability to cluster, so maintenance would have increased significantly. Vintela Authentication Services has fixed a hole in Linux's inability to securely share passwords across multiple servers effectively saving us the increase in manpower that this situation would have created. Without Vintela Authentication Services, a large scale out of Linux servers would have been unworkable."

Each of the 750 users at dunnhumby now has only one password, and more important only one authentication credential. "Without Vintela Authentication Services, some of our users would have needed up to six passwords. By having only one password per user, we have significantly reduced the amount of administration required, and we've reduced the risk of a security breach," said Williams. "Our users are also happier as they only need to remember one password."

dunnhumby's use of Vintela Authentication Services has removed the need for separate Windows and Unix teams to create user accounts. "When a person joins dunnhumby, only one AD account is created, which is used to access all applications--Windows or Unix/Linux--with no need for a Unix account. This saves us at least one hour per user. As a rapidly growing company -- we've grown by over 200 people in the last two years -- that's a saving of at least a couple of hours per week," said Williams.

Vintela Authentication Services has also enabled dunnhumby to save an additional four hours per week through reduced maintenance and administration of user permissions.

dunnhumby expects to achieve a return on its investment of Vintela Authentication Services within one year from the start of implementation.

About dunnhumby

dunnhumby is an international marketing consultancy and services company that helps retail brands and organisations engage more completely and profitably with their customers. As the leading provider of relevance marketing, dunnhumby enables its clients to turn unprecedented customer behaviour insight into relevant actions that demonstrably increase business value. The experience and knowledge gained from working with Tesco on Clubcard for more than ten years is now being deployed to rapidly change the fortunes of retail, CPG and consumer service organisations around the world. Services include data insight and segmentation, marketing communications, media measurement, innovation, promotion, ranging, service initiatives and organisational change. www.dunnhumby.com

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Quest Software, Inc. delivers innovative products that help organizations get more performance and productivity from their applications, databases and Windows infrastructure. Through a deep expertise in IT operations and a continued focus on what works best, Quest helps more than 50,000 customers worldwide meet higher expectations for enterprise IT. Quest Software can be found in offices around the globe and at www.quest.com.