

## Upscale Food & Wine Gift Supplier Sold on Best Price-per-Performance Offering with Azure Stack HCI

Houdini Inc. consolidates its infrastructure with an all-NVMe flash HCI solution from DataON and Microsoft



### The Challenge



- Refresh traditional aging SAN and consolidate infrastructure
- Improve storage efficiency and inventory management application performance
- Move away from expensive vendor lock-in hardware
- Increase back-end infrastructure network bandwidth and speed

### Company

Houdini Inc. is the leading supplier of upscale food and wine gifts to resellers throughout the U.S. Its trend-right gift assortments are found at America's foremost warehouse clubs, mass merchandisers, liquor retailers, specialty stores, catalog companies and internet sites. Houdini employs approximately 300 employees and up to 2,000 seasonal employees at its headquarters and distribution center in Fullerton, CA.



### IT Challenge

Houdini relies on its SQL Server-based inventory management software to automate inventory management, generate packing lists, and shipping to its e-commerce and B2B customers. As its SAN reached end-of-life, Houdini saw a performance drop in general and SQL Server applications, reducing overall work efficiency. Its data center was not running a virtualized environment and storage efficiency was less than optimal. Houdini wanted to refresh its data center, virtualize and consolidate its infrastructure and upgrade its networking.

Performance and budget were key concerns for Houdini. It liked its current IT vendor but wondered it might get a better price-per-performance offering from a different vendor. In either case, it was important that it received high quality support and hardware.

### The Solution

Houdini initially priced a simple replacement SAN, but the storage offering was very expensive. Andy Bocko, Director of Enterprise Systems, Houdini Inc., then started to look at hyper-converged infrastructure (HCI) as a potential solution. In his previous role as an IT consultant, Bocko had successfully deployed HCI with Microsoft Storage Spaces Direct, the software-defined storage component in Microsoft Azure Stack HCI. He liked the Microsoft offering because he felt it offered superior performance and value over VMware's HCI solution.

Bocko priced a four-node Azure Stack HCI solution with hybrid storage from a large OEM vendor. Although management was comfortable choosing a solution from a well-known brand it had experience with, Bocko wanted a higher-performance all-NVMe flash solution and wanted to explore another option.

In his previous role, Bocko had partnered with DataON on many successful IT projects. He valued DataON for its expertise in delivering validated Azure Stack HCI solutions, excellent price-per-performance offerings, and exceptional support from its team of Microsoft experts.

### The Solution



- Microsoft Azure Stack HCI
- DataON HCI-108 for Azure Stack HCI with Intel® all-NVMe flash SSDs
- Mellanox 100GbE ConnectX-5 NICs and Spectrum switches



## The Result



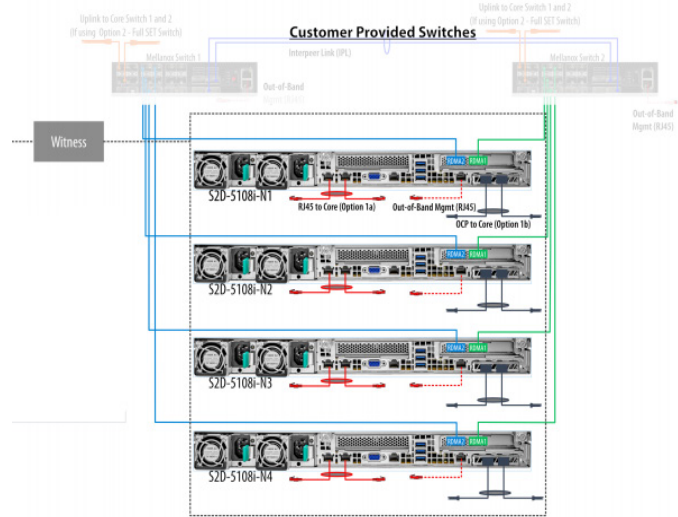
- Consolidated infrastructure with Microsoft-validated Azure Stack HCI solution from DataON
- Improved storage efficiency in a virtualized environment
- Increased inventory management application performance with all-NVMe flash
- Met budget and got more for less with DataON
- Upgraded to 100GbE Mellanox end-to-end networking

## Tip

“Plan for the future. Plan for five years so you don’t undersize your configuration. And invest in 100GbE networking. Make the freeway so wide you don’t care about traffic. Choose a vendor like DataON that specializes in Microsoft-validated Azure Stack HCI solutions to ensure smooth deployments and reliable performance.”

Andy Bocko  
Director of Infrastructure  
Houdini Inc.

From DataON, he could get the four-node Azure Stack HCI solution with all-NVMe flash he originally sought within his budget, while having enough budget left over for an additional four-node solution for a second cluster. Bocko also knew he would get superior support and white-glove service from DataON, something he could not get from other vendors.



## The Results

During the deployment, Bocko faced networking issues and sluggish application performance from using existing Cisco 100GbE RDMA switches. Cisco’s solution was to buy additional and costly Cisco switches. Concerned about compatibility and pricing, Bocko turned to DataON to help resolve his networking issues. Bocko bought and installed two Mellanox Spectrum 100GbE Ethernet switches with Mellanox’s Onyx switch software, solving his networking issues and providing substantial performance improvement.

Compared to his SAN, Bocko has seen a complete turnaround in performance in all his workloads, particularly with Houdini’s inventory management software. With increased compute, all-NVMe flash storage, and 100GbE networking, Houdini saw a 2x performance bump and increased work efficiency throughout the office and on the production line. He was able to consolidate Houdini’s infrastructure and improve storage efficiency in a virtualized environment.

Bocko said, “If I had chosen a traditional SAN, I would have gotten ten percent of the performance as I did with Azure Stack HCI for a lot more money.”

“DataON is a great partner. They are recognized throughout the industry as one of the leaders in Microsoft Azure Stack HCI solutions. Any time I have an issue or need advice, I can call them on the phone and get the support I need.”



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## About DataON

DataON is a hybrid cloud computing company focused on delivering Microsoft Azure Stack HCI, on-premises storage systems, intelligent edge appliances, and cloud-based Microsoft Azure Services. Our company is helping enterprises and customers who have made the “Microsoft choice” to modernize their IT with Microsoft applications, virtualizations, and data protection through a complete and turnkey experience. With over 850 HCI clusters and 150PB of storage deployed, DataON enterprise-level solutions are designed to provide the highest level of performance, manageability, and security offered. DataON is a Microsoft Gold Partner, Microsoft Cloud Service Provider (CSP), and an Intel Platinum Partner.