



## Executive Summary

# Six Flags: Turning Data into Smiles

### Overview

“The most important thing to all of us at Six Flags is entertaining our guests,” explains Six Flags CIO Michael Israel. For the world’s largest regional theme park corporation, creating the perfect guest experience means having the right people and products available at the right time—from rides and roller coasters to games, food, beverages, and souvenirs. Anticipating and reacting to the needs of 26 million visitors each year requires massive amounts of data on factors both inside and outside the park.

### Challenging the Status Quo

When Israel joined Six Flags in 2006, each of the company’s 18 facilities was running as an independent unit with its own local equipment. Every park had different systems for email, ticketing, point of sale, and other park functions.

Data was locked in silos and sent to a third party for analysis. By the time reports returned a week later, Six Flags had lost the opportunity to use that data when it was needed most. “As a result, a lot of decisions were based on years of experience and not necessarily true data,” explains Israel. “One of the key challenges we had in restructuring IT operations was bringing everything together.”

### Consolidating and Standardizing

Soon after joining the company, Israel led his organization in an ambitious effort to standardize hardware and operations across its 18 data centers and consolidate backup operations to a central data center in Dallas, Texas. Data from each park would be fed in real time to the Dallas data center, where it could be instantly analyzed and used to make up-to-the-minute decisions.

Israel made it a priority to standardize each data center by using integrated NetApp®, Cisco®, VMware®, and Microsoft® technologies, creating identical platforms across each location. This extreme uniformity enabled the company to streamline management and stamp out costly inefficiencies. Storage requirements were cut in half and operating expenditures were dramatically reduced.

“Even with the simplicity we have in place, it’s critical that all of our parts work together. Integrations from Microsoft, NetApp, and VMware serve one purpose: to make sure that our technology is available all the time,” explains Matthew Nowell, manager of SAN operations for Six Flags.

Six Flags’ newfound reliability and redundancy has enabled truly nonstop operations—even allowing IT to perform critical system upgrades in the middle of the day. Nonstop data availability means Six Flags never misses a chance to make a guest’s day.

### Key Highlights

#### Challenge

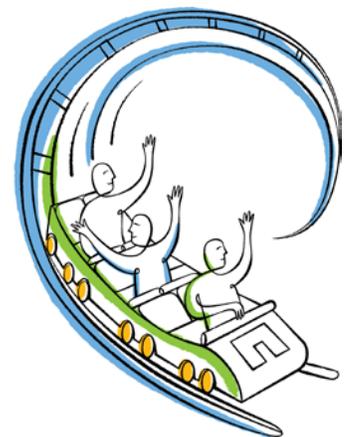
Streamline IT to improve visitor experience and keep guests coming back for more.

#### Solution

Consolidate and standardize 18 park data centers into a virtualized IT infrastructure by using integrated technologies from NetApp, VMware, Cisco, and Microsoft.

#### Results

- Consolidated data from 18 major data centers into 1
- Enabled instantaneous and reliable decision making based on real-time data
- Continued reducing park operating costs
- Achieved record profitability and guest satisfaction scores



## Making Smiles

With Six Flags' new infrastructure, IT plays an integral role in supporting the mission of the company by providing rapid, reliable access to data about park operations and visitor activities. Analysis that used to take a week now happens in an instant.

"We're in the business of making smiles," explains Nowell. "We are now able to use data to determine what each guest needs to put a smile on their face—right now."

Instantaneous information access alerts staff to changing conditions, such as long lines, dwindling merchandise inventory, and fluctuations in weather. Parks can now quickly adapt to meet the needs of their guests by shifting products and staff to the locations with the greatest demand.



"The future, from an IT and innovation perspective, is as thrilling as one of our biggest coasters."

**Michael Israel**  
CIO  
Six Flags

"If it's going to be colder than anticipated, we can reduce the number of lifeguards and increase the number of restaurant servers," explains Israel. "Or maybe pizza is more popular this week than it was last week. We can plan in advance to have enough on hand."

This new insight into the needs of its guests is helping Six Flags minimize risk, improve profit margins, and generate revenue in ways that never would have been possible eight years ago. Parks are now tracking and analyzing guest preferences to serve guests relevant promotions and improve their experience at the park.

"We are laser-focused on using data to enhance our guests' visits and ensuring we have the right products at the right place at the right time," explains Israel. "Our NetApp systems allow us to dive as deep as we possibly can into that data to allow for justified, real-time business decisions."

## Breaking Records

Since consolidating and standardizing on NetApp technology, Six Flags has reached new heights of profitability, with the best guest satisfaction ratings in the company's history. In the never-ending competition for guests' time and patronage, Six Flags is using every possible tool to create an unforgettable experience.

"As Six Flags grows, the needs of both our internal customers and our guests are going to change. NetApp technologies allow us to react quickly, flexibly, and reliably to both of those needs," says Israel. "The future, from an IT and innovation perspective, is as thrilling as one of our biggest coasters."



[www.netapp.com](http://www.netapp.com)

Leading organizations worldwide count on NetApp for software, systems and services to manage and store their data. Customers value our teamwork, expertise and passion for helping them succeed now and into the future.

© 2014 NetApp, Inc. All rights reserved. No portions of this document may be reproduced without prior written consent of NetApp, Inc. Specifications are subject to change without notice. NetApp and the NetApp logo are registered trademarks of NetApp, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. Cisco is a registered trademark of Cisco Systems, Inc. Microsoft is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation. VMware is a registered trademark of VMware, Inc. All other brands or products are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders and should be treated as such. DS-3602-0814

Follow us on:      