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NETWORK
INTERLINKS

Cost-efficient business planning

Combat Stress creates Virtual Environment to keep business running 24/7

Combat Stress is a UK military charity with its headquarters in Leatherhead. Like many companies, it is heavily dependent on its IT systems and requires a reliable business continuity solution.

BACKGROUND BUSINESS NEED

Combat Stress offers support to Veterans who suffer from psychological conditions related to their service career. This might be depression, anxiety, phobias or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Combat Stress provides either specialist clinical treatment at their three short-stay residential centres or the ability for them to tap into community outreach programmes, amongst other services.

As a care organisation it is important that patient records are readily available and the charity can only afford a maximum of three to four hours' loss of its IT core systems.

"We were looking for an off-site disaster recovery solution," explains Ranj Wijayaratne of Combat Stress. "So we wanted to implement a business continuity solution that would provide us access to our IT systems at all times and, in the event of an outage, that those systems would be as up-to-date as possible."

"We have been working with Network Interlinks since 2003 and knew that they have the requisite expertise to provide us with a resilient, flexible and cost-effective solution," he says. "With our status as a charity the factor of cost is always important. "

Understanding the cost of downtime, the charity chose a solution that reduces risk, and is scalable to cope with continually expanding data. "Our aim, in the event of an outage, is to be continually operational - at the very most our downtime will only be a few hours," says Ranj.

COMBAT STRESS

They fight our wars. We fight their battles.

SOLUTION SUMMARY

- Scalable and flexible data storage

- Solid business continuity and disaster recovery plan

- Centralisation of the company's Microsoft Exchange 2010 data, using DAG

- VMware vSphere 4 and Equilogic Solution

SOLUTION

Virtualisation brings continuity

Combat Stress's IT sytems are based on a Microsoft platform supporting a bespoke patient record solution, running on a SQL database. Network Interlinks upgraded the charity's messaging systems from Microsoft Exchange 2007 to Microsoft Exchange 2010 - installed on three servers, two in Leatherhead headquarters and one at the disaster recovery site. The situation uses Exchange 2010 DAG to provide continuous availability of Exchange should one server fail or become unavailable.

"In addition to those working onsite, we have about 40 remote outworkers and key staff who work offsite. These workers connect remotely to the core servers for email, using laptops and iPhones," says Ranj. "We have made application access available over the internet, via a secure Citrix gateway, using a two factor authentication onto the company's Xenapp servers. The Citrix Xenapp servers are configured in a six server farm and provide a very resilient, flexible and cost-effective solution.

Installed in Leatherhead is a twin head 16 terabyte unit with a second single head unit at the disaster recovery site. The primary unit offers centralised fast storage with snapshotting. This enables frequent local backups of data to be taken of the core systems every 15 minutes 24-7 - and the remaining systems every few hours.

The data from the snapshots is continuously replicated to the remote site, where it can be made available within hours of the primary site failing. VMware vSphere 4 was used to create a virtual server environment , allowing better utilisation of "Tin" and added resilience for the server farm using V-motion and HA technologies.

The use of virtualisation allows for rapid provisioning of additional servers at either site and easy recovery of servers should a server fail, "Previously what would have taken hours to recover now just takes a few minutes," adds Ranj.

OUTCOME

Within budget and to deadline

Virtualisation has the added benefit of reducing the need for many servers, which impacts not only cost, but the rack footprint in the data centre and power requirements too. "Virtualisation brings tangible cost savings," says Ranj.

"We chose VMware vSphere 4 as the virtual server platform as it is an industry standard solution which provides a cost-effective virtual platform. The platform is further enhanced by Equilogic Solution core storage. EqualLogic was chosen partly because we have many Dell PCs and laptops and also because the EqualLogic units provide a cost-effective base platform with replication technologies to support the solution."

The core EqualLogic units are scalable and, as the company grows, additional capacity can be added to provide mail archiving and/or document management for example. They are an industry standard solution (as are the Dell servers used for processing) which means that the solution has a long lifecycle and is supportable and flexible.

"Implementing a resilient business continuity solution has also meant we have centralised our data, which was one of our main aims. Network Interlinks understood our challenges and delivered a solution against the brief. The project took a little longer than originally intended because an opportunity was taken to introduce Exchange 2010 into the solution, to take advantage of the changing technologies. The original design brief was to deliver Exchange 2007. The introduction of Exchange 2010, utilising its DAG provisioning, gave the ability to dramatically improve the potential recovery times following a disaster. This also had an impact on our overall budget, but now that we have run the tests, we are very happy with the final outcome." Ranj concluded.

"We needed to install a resilient, flexible and costefficient solution that would deliver continuity for our business"

RANJ WIJAYARATNE, COMBAT STRESS

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