

“It’s a boy!” New generation storage at MaCS



Creativity, precision and profound IT expertise make the MaCS advertising and PR agency a partner of choice for leading IT suppliers. Meeting customer needs quickly and efficiently requires the agency to manage ever larger volumes of data. With a Nexsan Technologies ATAboy2x – a cost-effective, powerful and easy-to-manage storage system with high capacity and high data throughput – MaCS consolidated its storage environment.

The success of an advertising agency is increasingly dependent on a robust IT infrastructure. Ever more operations – particularly in the area of graphics – are being integrated into an IT-based digital workflow. Today, initial ideas are not scribbled on paper, but on a graphics tablet. Creative output is presented to customers as a PDF. And computer-to-plate technology means that printers and publishing houses are given all data in digital form.

Headquartered in Munich, Germany, MaCS GmbH – Marketing-Communication-Services – specializes in business-to-business communication for high-tech companies. MaCS customers – primarily suppliers of capital goods – need effective online campaigns and dialog marketing as well as high-quality brochures, customer magazines and sales promotion materials. Almost exclusively, such products need to be marketed using convincing technical arguments.

MaCS has many years of experience in conducting international campaigns for customers such as Hewlett-Packard, Oracle, Wacom and VeriSign. Part of its success is due to the use of a carefully harmonized digital supply chain. This stretches from freelancers via in-house resources for graphics, copy, layout and production, to the customer.

Utilizing these in-house resources, tasks are completed quickly and precisely, providing a clear benefit to the customers. Unnecessary approval steps can be omitted and even complex projects remain well-documented. This is particularly useful for large projects, such as the creation of customer magazines, large-format prints or large illustrated brochures.

Customer focus drives data growth

MaCS runs a mixed client environment: Apple Macintosh computers are used as the optimal platform for graphics and pre-press; standard PCs running Microsoft Office are used for business project management. In addition, many MaCS customers prefer electronic communication with PDFs for approval of drafts. This IT-based communication from first draft to electronic pre-press or the cutover of online marketing campaigns, results in data volumes that would have been inconceivable to an advertising agency only a few years ago.

“We have single graphics files of several hundred megabytes. A project can be 5 MB or even 500 MB. The rapid growth of data volume is only partially predictable because we put customer focus first,” explains Wolfgang Tittmar, CEO of MaCS.

It is primarily conventional marketing measures that require high storage capacity. Online campaigns tend to be less demanding with regard to storage.

However, business process management also adds data volume. The Exchange database alone has grown to more than 18 GB within a couple of years. An Extranet file structure stores 50 GB of project data. A separate agency controlling software environment consumes another 4 GB.

The Quark® Xpress files for one project may be around 250 MB in size, while a customer magazine such as HP Computer NEWS quickly adds up to some 500 or 600 MB. A brochure accounts for about 340 MB.

MaCS supplies sales promotion literature for a variety of European countries and data sheets typically require some 25 to 35 MB per language. “We recommend that our customers tailor their marketing measures specifically to the local target group. We don’t translate, we localize. MaCS has many years of experience in international campaigns,” explains Wolfgang Tittmar.

As a result, several hundred gigabytes have to be transported, stored and archived every month.

Evolved storage environment inadequate

The legacy structure of storage and backup systems only partially met requirements. The Apple computers and PCs had been connected via a 10/100-BaseT network into which separated file servers were also integrated. But at no time, had all storage resources been visible to all systems in the network.

To address the need for disk space, data was stored on separate RAID systems on agency-wide file servers and on the graphics department file server, as well as local hard disks. MaCS employees – especially graphic designers and DTP specialists – had to use great care and finesse to keep everything organized.

Thus, MaCS was searching for a solution to consolidate storage, create more data security and improve data throughput. Within only a couple of hours MaCS reached these objectives by deploying an ATAboy2x from Nexsan Technologies.

“Although the cost of storage per terabyte is falling, the volume of data continues to rise. This results in greater cost and effort in relation to data management. We are glad to have found a system that is as simple to manage as Nexsan’s ATAboy,” continues Wolfgang Tittmar. The ATAboy2x not only offers MaCS cost-effective storage capacity for primary storage, but also improved data management.

As part of the move to a new company building, a one gigabit Ethernet (GbE) network was installed. Each of the historical villa’s four levels has a GbE FC switch to transport graphics and layouts faster via Fibre Channel (FC) from the file server to workplaces. That is where the high data throughput of the ATAboy2x pays off, as the storage system never causes a bottleneck in the IT infrastructure.



Easy deployment

MaCS now uses a practical compact storage system from Nexsan Technologies for storing all kinds of data. In order to eliminate the uncontrolled growth of the storage environment while achieving greater security and increased data throughput, MaCS moved the old storage environment to an ATAboy2x from Nexsan Technologies within the space of a few hours.

The Nexsan ATAboy2x is equipped with eight 250 GB ATA hard disks. The gross storage capacity is more than 1.65 TB. The seven active ATA disks are configured as RAID Level 5. The Nexsan ATAboy2x features dual controller design, which – as a result of its high performance in RAID Level 5 – achieves read throughput rates of up to 600 MB/s. The performance enhancement brought by the ATAboy2x is evident at each single desk: Gone are the delays that used to occur when the graphics department accessed files from the legacy server's slower disks.

The browser-based GUI (Graphical User Interface) allowed installation and configuration to be completed in next to no time. "Installation was really quick and smooth," says Thomas Bichweiler, who manages IT at MaCS. "The ATAboy even recognized the RAID controller of the old 60 GB system – which has been in use for four years." At MaCS, where the ATAboy2x is connected to the GbE LAN, transitioning the Nexsan ATAboy2x to live operation was intuitive and required no previous knowledge. "I have never seen such powerful user guidance in a system of this category. It's the standard you expect to find in enterprise class storage systems," confirms Thomas Bichweiler.

Furthermore, the Nexsan ATAboy2x can be hot configured. This allows MaCS to respond to changes in demand quickly and without service interruption. The cost-effective ATA hard disks are also hot pluggable, allowing them to be swapped during operation. As each controller supports 32 LUNs (Logical Unit Numbers) per port, the Munich-based agency can tailor its storage environment to current needs. LUNs can also be changed without loss of data. So if a new hard disk has to be added to an LUN, this can be done as required without interruption and without reconfiguration. This is also supported by the extensive compatibility of the host adapter, which can communicate with the controllers in legacy servers.

"Another feature we really appreciate is the ATAboy's Health Management System," says Thomas Bichweiler. The Nexsan ATAboy2x monitors the condition of the individual hard disks and the entire system. Any impending fault condition is announced via the GUI. Also, the company's IT manager can be alerted by text message in case he is not in the building when a system-critical situation arises. The remote maintenance features of the Nexsan Technologies storage system allow Thomas Bichweiler to dial into the MaCS network and initiate any measures necessary to prevent data loss.

Future proof and room for development

MaCS is already planning the next steps of IT infrastructure development: The re-design of the backup environment and a cost-efficient, reliable disaster recovery solution. In order to meet this goal, a thoroughly planned storage system landscape is essential. An ATAboy2x could play a major role in the disaster recovery scenario. MaCS' investment in the first ATAboy2x is protected even if the company adds an FC SAN (Fibre Channel Storage Area Network) to the current network infrastructure. The ATAboy2x RAID controller supports double 2 Gb FC connections for this configuration.

The installation of an additional ATAboy2x also increases data security at the advertising and PR agency. As MaCS operates internationally, work continues throughout European office hours and for the most part during US office hours as well. This has considerably reduced the backup window in recent years. Whereas MaCs used to rely on multi-part backup sets on tape, the company now intends to supplement security by installing a second ATAboy2x with a D2D (disk-to-disk) backup solution. This will allow MaCS to increase data security and dispense with the need for tape backups, without any major changes to the business and data management processes.

For MaCS, the Nexsan ATAboy2x is the first step towards expanding its storage environment. Wolfgang Tittmar is happy with the solution: "We have established that intelligent storage solutions like the ATAboy clearly reduce the load on the IT infrastructure even of small companies like ours." He concludes: "Nexsan products will definitely be on our list when we're looking to establish a remote backup solution."

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Wolfgang Tittmar, CEO MaCS GmbH





MaCS

MaCS GmbH is a full-service B2B communication agency headquartered in Oberschleissheim near Munich. For over ten years, the company has specialized in marketing communication and PR for the European IT and high-tech markets. With 40 employees, MaCS works for German companies, for the Germany-based European headquarters of international groups, and for American companies. MaCS has subsidiaries in San Francisco, London and Villach, Austria. For further information, visit www.macs.de.



Nexsan Technologies

Nexsan Technologies specializes in the development and manufacture of innovative and cost-effective storage solutions. Headquartered in Woodland Hills, California, the company develops and markets award-winning storage hardware and software via a worldwide network of storage professionals.

Nexsan Technologies solutions are primarily used in the areas of corporate applications, graphics, medical imaging, animation and special effects, real-time or event-monitored online and offsite storage, Internet-delivered content, digital film, financial online transaction data, music & voice, video security, and document imaging. For further information, visit www.nexsan.com.

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