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Chicago Records Management Launches Digital Services with EqualLogic® SAN

Company:

Off-site records storage and data management service provider

Industry:

Business Services

Platform:

Microsoft® Windows® 2003

Applications:

Digitech digital imaging; Microsoft SQL, Exchange; Andrews Software, Inc. (ASI) Visual Corporate Keeper® (VCK) warehouse inventory management; Symantec™-VERITAS® Backup Exec

Challenges:

Highly available, reliable storage for hosted digital imaging and electronic backup solutions, as well as mission-critical warehouse inventory management

Solution:

PS300E with 500 gigabyte disks for all business applications and electronic services; daily snapshots for online archive

With warehouses containing over a million boxes of documents and thousands of data tapes in a climate-controlled fire-resistant vault, Chicago Records Management (CRM) is one of the largest independently owned records management centers in the U.S. Founded in 1988, this family-owned company with 50 employees is located outside of Chicago, Illinois.

While continuing to provide hardcopy document storage, CRM has been implementing major changes recently. First, they are consolidating two warehouses into a single new facility near O'Hare Airport. Second, they have expanded their offerings to include digital imaging and electronic backup, making them an application service provider as much as an off-site record center. These revenue growth opportunities were the key drivers that led IT manager Bob Maiers to buy an EqualLogic iSCSI SAN.

Digital Imaging and Electronic Backup

The successful launch of these two electronic services depended not only on new applications, but on highly available and reliable data storage – the EqualLogic PS300E storage array. Using a tailored application from Digitech Systems, Inc., a team of CRM employees creates and stores digital images of receipts, medical records and images, legal records, and original and confidential documents. While some customers use the service for disaster recovery, others – particularly law firms – appreciate mobile document access. The application can be deployed down to a single laptop or accessed over the Internet, so users can do keyword searches of their archived data, pulling up documents as needed.

Once Maiers started using the EqualLogic array he realized how much more he could do with it. In addition to supporting Microsoft Exchange and SQL Server, the PS300E supports his most critical application – Visual Corporate Keeper (VCK) for warehouse inventory management, which identifies the floor, rack, level, and position of each box. Says Maiers, "I put that application on the EqualLogic array because I need something that I know will keep that data available at all times. Without that information I essentially have a million boxes of nothing."

In addition, Maiers is currently in the process of launching an electronic backup service. Small systems deployed at customer sites will collect data for backup and send it to the EqualLogic array through a CRM server.

EqualLogic Delivers, Today and in the Future

Having implemented numerous Hewlett-Packard, EMC®, and Hitachi® Fibre Channel SANs, Maiers originally assumed that Fibre Channel was his only option. But when EqualLogic channel partner CDW realized Maiers' dissatisfaction with both the price and growth constraints of traditional solutions, they recommended EqualLogic. Maiers saw tremendous value in iSCSI, since Fibre Channel HBAs cost as much as the average server he deploys. But what really sold him was the advanced functionality. "I was used to paying hundreds of thousands of dollars for snapshots and replication," says Maiers, "and with EqualLogic these are built in. With other solutions, to buy a system even capable of adding that functionality would start at six figures – and that's before the software."

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*- CRM's IT Manager,
Bob Maiers*

Another key reason Maiers selected EqualLogic was the ability to start small and expand without disruption. Says Maiers, "With other solutions performance degrades as you grow, and you're forced to reinvest in additional technology. But with EqualLogic, the more I add to it, the faster it gets." He began with a PS300E half filled with 500 gigabyte disk drives, knowing he can add capacity as needed without disruption to current operations.

Reassurance and Return on Investment

In addition to the new applications, protection of the warehouse inventory management system is crucial. Once a day Maiers backs up the inventory data to disk, takes a snapshot, then backs up to tape. The snapshot is key, because his most important archive is today's snapshot or yesterday's backup. Even a week-old archive of the warehousing inventory would be useless because too much change would have occurred.

The digital imaging service enabled by the EqualLogic SAN solution has been highly successful. "I haven't had a single problem with my EqualLogic storage," says Maiers. "I get to concentrate on building my business – not sit in a computer room handling machines and disks." Maiers feels completely confident that he chose the right solution, because future growth will not require completely retooling his environment. "When I consider projects for the future, I don't cringe at the prospect of upgrading storage; instead, I know the EqualLogic SAN will do the job, no problem."

Simplifying Networked Storage

EqualLogic PS Series solutions deliver the benefits of storage consolidation in an intelligent, enterprise-class storage system that is easy to install, manage and grow. Visit our web site at www.equallogic.com and let us show you what *simplifying networked storage* can mean for your business.

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