

Case Study



Aberdeen City Council implements enterprise backup of email for 4,000 staff

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Robert Duff, Aberdeen City Council IT Services

Company Background

Aberdeen City Council is responsible for all local government services in Aberdeen and is the city's largest employer. Aberdeen City Council has 43 elected members who meet regularly, in committees and collectively, to make decisions about local services and about various aspects of city life.

These decisions are implemented by our workforce of around 11,000. The council works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations in the city and beyond.

The Challenge

Aberdeen City Council delivers IT services to its 4,000 user base on a range of networking platforms; Sun Solaris, UNIX, Linux, Microsoft Windows, and Novell. With an ever-increasing demand on IT for 24/7 data availability, the Council agreed to implement a two part business continuity solution for their critical email data. They firstly installed a six-node volume cluster, with an EMC CX500 storage array tape library. Having subsequently moved over 3 terabytes of email data to the new SAN (Storage Area Network) the first phase of this project was complete.

The next step was to provide an enterprise email backup and restore solution for the SAN. This specific cluster consisted of six NetWare 6.5 servers. Not only did all the data need to be backed up efficiently; the solution had to accommodate any failover of services while the backup was being performed, preferably all through a single management console.

There are many backup products on the market that claim to have cross-platform email support through one catalogue interface. Having carried out extensive research, the Council soon became aware that most of those products had not proven to be successful. Therefore, alongside the functionality specification, the Council also required a certified product and service provider for this unique cluster.

The Solution

Aberdeen City Council took their request to tender. It was awarded to ANS Group, a leading provider of

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a leading provider of professional business continuity solutions. SyncSort Backup Express, part of the continuity suite from ANS Group, is an award-winning enterprise backup product that supports all network environments and email platforms. With the strong relationship between product vendor, SyncSort, and solution provider, ANS Group, the Council were delighted with their joint offering and happily agreed the sign off for their solution package.

After rigorous testing, the Council extended their current ADIC tape library with an extra silo to accommodate the new backup data. This device was situated in a separate location from the main cluster for improved disaster recovery in the case of a fire, flood or other physical failure. The tape library was then connected to the fabric switches on the SAN cluster via a fibre channel link. ANS Group also ensured that there was multi-path failover so if for any reason one of the channels failed the cluster data would find another way through to the tape library.

Positioned on the LAN, the Backup Express Master Server was then installed on SuSE Linux Enterprise Server 9 and connected to the same fibre switches on the SAN. Backup Express agents were positioned on each of the NetWare cluster servers. Although typical backup devices encourage bandwidth limitations by sending data over the LAN, with SyncSort the nodes were configured to communicate directly to the tape library device within the new location. This also meant that each of the six servers in the cluster could view all four of the tape devices in the library at the same time. The Master Server, providing a single management console with an intuitive GUI, acts as a coordinator to the agents, ensuring an efficient backup takes place. It can even perform its own backup if necessary.

Aberdeen City Council can now rest assured that their email information is securely protected every night by Backup Express. Robert Duff, Aberdeen City Council IT Services, noted, “We awarded the tender to ANS Group based on their customer references and value for money. Business continuity is a growing threat for most organisations but now, thanks to SyncSort and ANS Group, I don’t have to worry about the email backup process when I go home. He added, “Backup Express is cluster-aware so that if failover occurs during an email backup job, the task will automatically search and succeed on another available node. This was the unique selling point we required. ANS Group has provided us with a simple, professional and resilient solution that ensures high email data availability. We are very pleased with the results.”



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