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COMPREHENSIVE BACKUP WITH vRANGER PRO™ SAFEGUARDS TESTING & DEVELOPMENT

vizioncore™

THE SITUATION

Norwood Promotional Products planned to switch its test and development environment from a hosted service to virtualized in-house servers, but only if it could find a comprehensive backup system to protect its work.

THE SOLUTION

After evaluating systems that cost more, were harder to use and slower to execute, Norwood Promotional Products installed vRanger Pro for backup and recovery for its VMware virtual environment.

THE RESULTS

"We found that after we make performance changes and tweaks that don't work out, we can get back to where we were very, very easily. vRanger [Pro] is two or three times faster than what we had before."

Larry Chisholm
IT Operations Manager
Norwood Promotional Products

THE SITUATION

Norwood Promotional Products relies heavily on its PeopleSoft ERP system, and depends on new applications and enhancements to it so that operations run better and the company be more productive. Norwood Promotional Products' IT staff and contractors are continually seeking improvements to the ERP system through an ongoing testing and development (T&D) effort. The company, which is the largest North American supplier of imprinted promotional products, including writing instruments, calendars, mugs, apparel, awards and accessories, wanted to switch its T&D environment from a hosted service to in-house servers, but could only make the move if it could ensure it would have comprehensive backup and fast restore capabilities for its systems.

"We use consultants and contractors for some of our development. We can't afford to have them sitting around because a system is down," said Larry Chisholm, IT operations manager at Norwood Promotional Products.

The company had already heavily virtualized its IT systems and had standardized on VMware Infrastructure 3. It planned to host its testing and development environment on virtualized Microsoft servers -- but only if it could find a robust virtual backup system.

"We run a lean team that stays very busy," said Chisholm. "We needed a solution that was easy to set up, easy to use and could eliminate a lot of the scripting work that was required in the other solutions we looked at."

A major reason that the IT team sought a solution that was exceptionally easy to use was because it needed to be deployed at multiple facilities and used by many administrators to enable fast restoration. The solution also needed to be comprehensive — backing up virtual machine configuration settings, not just files.

"The ability to back up and restore configuration settings was critical for our testing and development purposes," said Mel Hirtzel, Norwood Promotional Products' director of IT operations. "We're always making tweaks and changes, and sometimes find things worked better another way, so it's important for us to be able to go back easily."

THE SOLUTION

Once before, Norwood Promotional Products had used a Vizioncore product to assist the company through a transition. When the company went through its major upgrade from VMware's ESX Server 2.5 to Infrastructure 3.0, it used Vizioncore's vMigrator to seamlessly port its virtual machines to the new platform. The process was so smooth that Vizioncore became the default choice to provide backup and recovery for the company's virtualized testing and development systems. Norwood Promotional Products selected Vizioncore's vRanger Pro backup and recovery solution for its virtual T&D environment and is expanding its use of vRanger Pro throughout the virtualized segment of its data center operations.

"When it comes to backing up the operating system and all the configurations, it was a no-brainer to go with vRanger Pro," said Chisholm. "My guys had the product figured out within 20 minutes, so the learning curve was pretty shallow. That was a big consideration, considering that we were planning to deploy this software so widely throughout the company."

Norwood Promotional Products regularly backs up about 30 virtual machines weekly. Because vRanger Pro completes the backup process quickly, developers also use it to periodically back up projects in case changes don't work out. The fast backup gives them more flexibility and saves rework, especially when configuration changes are involved.

"It took us more time to decide when to do our backups and restores than it does to run the software," said Chisholm. "We found when we make performance changes and tweaks, we can get back to where we were very easily."

Virtual machines are backed up over fibre to a Microsoft Windows repository server on an EMC storage area network (SAN). vRanger Pro creates an image-level backup and can execute while the virtual machine is running, which minimizes downtime and simplifies scheduling. Backup files are compressed enough to transfer by WAN, although Norwood Promotional Products uses network-attached storage.

THE RESULTS

While backups are important, Norwood would attest – like so many other companies – that it's the restore process that really holds value for a company that needs to prevent downtime and ensure the business keeps up and running. And Norwood had the opportunity to test vRanger Pro's recovery functionality when one of its VMs developed problems.

"We went from a failed server to a running server in half an hour. For testing and development purposes, that was critical," said Chisholm. "That's at least two or three times faster than any other alternative we have tried."

vRanger Pro proved so convenient and effective in the test and development environment that Norwood Promotional Products is using it to back up more of its virtual infrastructure. The company also found vRanger Pro easy to roll out to other company locations.

"We appreciate how quickly users with no experience can be up and running with vRanger Pro," Hirtzel said.

vRanger Pro has also fit in well with the budget. "Because licensing is based on the socket and not how many VMs are put on the server, vRanger Pro costs me about half of what other products would cost to implement. Vizioncore's products are very affordable – and given how reliable these products are – provide outstanding price point value to our organization," said Chisholm.

Performance, comprehensive backup, fast restores and value are the main reasons Norwood Promotional Products is now standardizing on vRanger Pro as its enterprise-wide virtual backup and recovery solution.

"Now every time we purchase a VM, we purchase licensing for vRanger Pro. It's a great enhancement to our virtual infrastructure," said Chisholm. "We've said: 'If you purchase VMware, you're purchasing vRanger to go with it.' That's how it is."



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