At Wishard Health Services, Symantec NetBackup Performs Flawless Restore

In response to a major data disaster, Symantec NetBackup exceeds expectations by restoring data to Wishard’s vital systems in record time.

NEEDED: A NEW BACKUP SOLUTION

Wishard Health Services, located in Indianapolis, Indiana, is one of the leading providers of healthcare in central Indiana, with a 316-bed hospital, various inpatient facilities, and 10 community health centers. When the organization hired Eric Gosnell as a backup specialist in June, 2010, the facility had just experienced a major failure with its SAP enterprise business operations software. Unable to restore the data, it took the team three months to recreate it and bring the system current.

Shortly after being hired, Gosnell was promoted to IT operations manager and tasked with building a new data backup environment for Wishard. Initially, Gosnell considered a combined solution of the NetBackup utility with EMC’s Data Domain. When Symantec announced the NetBackup 5020 appliance, an integrated purpose-built backup solution that combined the best of both worlds, Gosnell took notice. “The integration with NetBackup that exists within the appliance was an opportunity I didn’t want to pass up. We went with a total NetBackup solution.”

DISASTER STRIKES

On August 6, 2013, the team was alerted of a sudden, cascading problem originating in the storage area network (SAN). While performing routine maintenance—replacing a tray on the SAN—another tray failed at the same time. In trying to fix its own problems, the SAN wound up corrupting every database in the environment—some 38 systems. “Clinical systems, financial systems, patient registration—we had a massive failure across everything that’s vital to Wishard,” said Gosnell.

The implications were serious. Wishard receives a great deal of Medicare and Medicaid cases and serves as the Level 1 trauma center for the city of Indianapolis. During the system outage, the facility was placed in a state known as diversion, which means it no longer serves as the primary trauma center for that period of time.

Getting the IT systems working again as quickly as possible was urgent. All processes were impaired. The healthcare facility couldn’t bill for services rendered, register patients into the system, or track orders. “When systems are down, everything has to be done on paper. It’s extremely staff-intensive, and the longer you’re down, the worse it gets,” said Gosnell.

In addition, Gosnell points out that every minute in these restore processes has a direct impact on a patient’s well-being—and on family members as well. “It’s traumatic to see a loved one in pain; it’s never good. Any minute of delay in the process, for example, that delivers medication to a room is a horrific inconvenience, so getting these systems back online is of paramount importance anytime they’re down.”

NETBACKUP PERFORMS

Gosnell’s team spent the first 15 hours recouping the SAN itself and getting the equipment back online. For a period of time, the team wasn’t even aware of the extended corruption. “Our users were reporting some flaky behavior, but we couldn’t really pinpoint what that was,” said Gosnell.

“We were 18 to 20 hours into the event before we even began to understand the magnitude of what had happened, and what would be required to restore the data. To say we had systems back on as early as 36 to 38 hours into the event, considering
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we wasted the first 20 hours of that dealing with other processes, is truly remarkable.”

Once they realized the extent of the failure, Gosnell’s team identified which databases were affected. The team’s quick response enabled them to perform proactive restores and return data and applications back to disk locations for Wishard’s offsite vendors so those vendors could perform their own restores.

Because his team chose the NetBackup utility in combination with NetBackup appliances, Gosnell said recovery was almost instantaneous. “We were getting rates at around 100 gigs an hour on almost every system that we tried to restore; this technology is extremely seamless and fast.”

“Ninety percent—and I’m not overselling this—of the time to restore applications in the systems was on the administrative end, meaning NetBackup had done its job, performed its restore, and gotten the data back to the database administrators or consultant groups. Ninety percent of the time taken to restore this was not on the NetBackup side—and that is so often not the case in these situations.”

OPERATIONS RESTORED

In addition to the NetBackup appliance itself, Gosnell credits Symantec’s training with helping Wishard contain and rectify the situation. Gosnell’s associate, Bryan Glass, had been performing backups for less than a year, but had availed himself of the Symantec online encyclopedia, online training courses, and at least one formal training class. “Bryan was able to demonstrate to me and to this entire organization the value of Symantec’s training and his own initiative.”

As it turned out, Gosnell’s team logged only one support ticket during the emergency and rectified that sole problem even before they received the return call. Also, with both the appliances and the utility from one vendor, Gosnell appreciated the fact that if there were problems with the restore, he need call only one place for help. “This was of great peace to me throughout the whole process. I knew I wouldn’t have any issues getting the support I needed,” he said.

All told, the operation took less than three days as opposed to the two to six months Gosnell estimates it would have taken with the prior installation. Even Gosnell was surprised.

“I was worried, to be honest. You strive for perfection. You build the best design you can. But, unless an event happens, you never really know how it will perform. NetBackup exceeded the mark in every single case.”

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