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MARQUETTE BANK
Love where you bank

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Integrated Data Center Solutions

Sigma Solutions delivers Integrated Data Center Solution to help Marquette Bank reduce costs, increase efficiency and ensure the availability of mission-critical systems.

At Marquette Bank, superior customer service isn't just a goal — it's a commitment. The bank's "Love Where You Bank" promise is built upon six customer-focused principles, including friendliness and personal attention, convenience, expertise and professionalism, local roots, product availability, and neighborhood commitment. This approach has helped Marquette Bank grow to $1.5 billion in assets with 470 employees in 22 locations across Chicagoland.

Because technology plays a key role in its ability to provide superior customer service, Marquette Bank launched an initiative in 2009 to ensure the availability of its IT systems in the event of a disaster. The initiative, which the bank calls its Customer First Plan, involved a transition from disaster recovery to business continuity.

"Our business is customer service," said Mike Banky, Senior Vice President and CIO, Marquette Bank. "One of the things that we saw as a challenge for us was the impact on customer service during any kind of IT disruption, whether it's a small- or large-scale disaster. We decided to move from a traditional disaster recovery mindset to a business continuity mindset such that if we do have a disruption, the impact on our customers and our employees who serve them would be small."

Marquette Bank called upon Sigma Solutions to provide the technical resources needed for the initiative. Sigma helped guide the bank from a technology perspective and implement best-of-breed solutions that would provide the availability and reliability the bank needed. This included virtualizing servers, improving the bank's backup and replication processes, and setting up a "hot" failover site.

"In order to have more control over business continuity, we wanted to create our own live hot site on our property that we could manage and access whenever we needed," Banky said. "We took this vision to Sigma and together we broke the project out into phases and determined the best way of implementing it."

Virtual Machines, Real Benefits

Sigma has enjoyed a longstanding relationship with Marquette Bank, based upon both technical expertise and a good cultural fit with the bank's IT team. Sigma's engineers worked with them to map out an Integrated Data Center strategy that would help them meet their goals — a consultative approach that Banky appreciates.

"One of the things I like about Sigma's staff is that they aren't 'technicians' or a technical sales group just looking to sell products," he said. "They approach projects more as business analysts who also have technical expertise. They spend a lot of time listening to our vision and our needs and that has been really refreshing."

After the framework of the project had been laid out, Sigma worked with the bank to deploy virtualization and consolidate servers. The goal was to not only reduce the number of physical machines within the bank's environment but to minimize both planned and unplanned downtime.

"We look for as many benefits as possible when we invest in technology," said Banky. "By implementing virtualization and refreshing our equipment with newer blade server technology, we gained a smaller footprint that requires less electricity and cooling and the ability to manage processes even better. We can create virtual instances of systems, and let our application experts review upgrades and make sure everything is working properly before rolling the new instance into production. This enables us to perform software upgrades faster but with less risk."

Sigma also helped Marquette Bank replace its tape-based backup and replication systems with a disk-to-disk solution. This improved the bank's recovery point objectives and recovery time objectives considerably and provided a number of other benefits as well.

"Sigma helped us to understand how virtualization and storage work together. That has helped us reduce costs and make our backup and replication processes faster and more efficient," Banky said.

Knowledge Is Power

The project plan called for virtualizing and replicating the bank's servers in phases, starting with mission-critical systems and moving toward those of a lower priority. As that phase of the project comes to a close, the Sigma team is helping Banky explore redundant telecommunications technology to ensure that branch locations can access critical applications and data.

"We are looking at migrating to MPLS and adding redundant telecommunication links. We are also researching the ability to connect our branches via wireless so that we can continue business if a telecommunication line gets cut," he said.

"We are relying upon Sigma's expertise in routing and switching for this phase. Their engineers are helping us figure out how these technologies work together and how we can have automatic failover to prevent an outage. We're picking their brains on that."

Knowledge transfer has been a key aspect of the project from the beginning. The Sigma team has worked side-by-side with Marquette Bank's IT staff, helping them to understand the technology from the ground up.

"I look to Sigma to help keep us informed," said Banky. "I sent a couple of my staff to VMware classes but formal classes are more theoretical than practical. Sigma provides real-world education, bringing the theoretical into the practical within our environment. I also look to Sigma to provide us best practices based upon their experience with other clients and what's happening out in the market."

Marquette Bank has a small in-house IT staff but outsources where it makes sense. The relationship with Sigma enables the bank's IT team to remain laser focused on customer service.

"I have a great team — we're a small shop but very efficient," Banky said. "We look to Sigma to help us with larger projects and to educate us so that we can effectively handle any issues that come up.

"I have tons of vendors but very few partners, and Sigma is a partner. A partner has to be a resource, someone that listens and really understands our culture and how we work. Sigma does that for us."