BLICK ROTHENBERG
Chartered Accountants

"Our approach to our business continuity strategy was we should be able to recover critical systems easily, and that replication of data had to be in real-time for those applications. Double-Take Availability provided us with a solid platform for keeping our disaster recovery systems up to date and synchronized, while also proving to be very cost-effective."

Dan Davies, Head of IT, Blick Rothenberg

Business Profile

Company Name:
Blick Rothenberg

Headquarters:
United Kingdom

Industry:
Accountancy

Business Environment:
Blick Rothenberg is one of the top independent chartered accountants in the United Kingdom. Based in Central London, the company offers audit, assurance and business advisory services, as well as advice on corporate and personal tax matters. One of the largest single office practices in the UK, the firm also has an international reach through its membership of BKR International, a global association of independent accounting and business advisory firms based in more than 70 countries.

Business Environment:
• A diverse UK corporate practice providing advice for entrepreneurs, owner-managed businesses and large UK international businesses, including listed companies
• A technical and client-focused private client practice to deliver proactive advice and solutions that are tailored to the needs of individual clients
• A long history of involvement with charitable and not for profit organizations

Vision Solutions Product:
Double-Take Availability

Implementation Team:
Blick Rothenberg

Critical issue

Blick Rothenberg required a business continuity solution that would help them reduce the potential time taken to recover their critical applications. The organization chose Double-Take Availability, which enabled the company to reduce the time from within the timeframes established by the business continuity plan to less than five hours for full system recovery. As part of the implementation, Double-Take provided Blick Rothenberg with greater flexibility around its disaster recovery strategy by letting the company move away from snapshots and tape-based backup.

Results

• Blick Rothenberg now relies upon real-time data replication to protect applications and critical business data
• Data for these applications can be restored faster and in line with business objectives
• Replication ensures that workers who are working at the office or telecommuting can be supported by the firm's disaster recovery site.

Technologies

• Double-Take Availability
• Double-Take Virtual Recovery Assistant (VRA)
• VMware vSphere
• Dell servers at primary and secondary locations
• NetApp Storage Area Network (SAN) at primary site
• Dell MD3000 Direct Attached Storage (DAS) at secondary site

Business Challenge

Established in 1945, Blick Rothenberg has a long-standing reputation for excellence and reliability in audit, assurance and business advisory services.

The company already had in place a disaster recovery process based on tape backup. However, the IT team at the firm found that a rapid and substantial growth in the company's volume of data would potentially cause the timeframe of their existing disaster recovery strategy to increase significantly for a full system restore.

Faced with this potentially unacceptable level of downtime, the IT team at Blick Rothenberg started looking for way to solve this problem before it arose. The company's IT Manager, James Sillett, led the review. "The purpose of the exercise was not to achieve zero downtime, but rather to ensure the timeframe for recovery would stay at an acceptable level using disk-to-disk replication. This included looking at alternative technologies that would complement our existing virtualization strategy, and help us become less reliant upon tape-based recovery," he commented.

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Blick Rothenberg had a virtualized data center in place at its London office, and a secondary location available as part of its recovery strategy that would support up to 50 employees. However, Sillett's initial evaluation of technologies uncovered several potential gaps if those were chosen. "Our existing IT infrastructure was based on our NetApp SAN; however, this uses snapshots in order to replicate data over to a second site. Going down this route would require a second SAN unit at the DR facility, which would be a large additional expense," commented Sillett. "We also felt that the snapshot approach would not be appropriate for our critical applications, as they have high load levels."

Sillett decided to evaluate other approaches, including real-time replication, as this provided a better fit for the company's requirements. As such, he looked at Double-Take Availability from Vision Solutions. "We selected Double-Take for several key reasons including its ease of installation and real-time replication capabilities. Additionally, Double-Take works independently of the virtualization or storage products that we have in place, so it provides us with much greater flexibility," said Sillett.

Solution

Working with the IT provider Softcat, Blick Rothenberg's IT team was responsible for implementing Double-Take as part of the wider disaster recovery strategy. Double-Take Availability was deployed to protect and replicate data from the company's business critical applications – Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SQL Server, and its file servers.

Any change made on these applications is sent in real-time across to the secondary site, where the backup server images are hosted on a Dell MD3000 direct attached storage (DAS) unit linked to a server hosting the virtual machine images and Double-Take Virtual Recovery Assistant.

In the event of a failure, Double-Take VRA automatically provisions the required virtual machines so they can be made available to employees. "Under our previous business continuity plan, most of our time would have been spent installing machines from tape backup copies. With Double-Take, our disaster recovery process is much shorter. Most importantly, the Double-Take solution is much more straightforward to use, as we don't need as many specific skills around applications in order to recover the workloads themselves. In an emergency event, that's critical," commented Sillett.

As part of the implementation phase, Blick Rothenberg's IT team decided to concentrate on protecting only the data that required it, rather than replicating everything. This included specifying data that was not needed for applications such as log files and anti-virus files, which were then moved into specific folders and not targeted for replication. Alongside the WAN optimization capabilities that are built into the product, this approach ensures that only essential business data is replicated using Double-Take, allowing the company to stick with its existing bandwidth levels.

The installation of Double-Take at Blick Rothenberg was completed in August 2011. Following the implementation, the company included full tests of the disaster recovery process as part of its overall business continuity planning, for which three days are set aside during the year. The company has now included one full test procedure as part of its overall DR testing, during which the fail-over went as expected.

"Our implementation has already been proven as delivering on our goals: full continuity for our mission-critical data. Double-Take provides us with a solid data replication mechanism that supports our needs as a business. The testing we have carried out has demonstrated to us that we have a reliable and effective solution in place," said Sillett.

High Availability ❖ Disaster Recovery ❖ Systems and Data Management

Conclusion

Blick Rothenberg now benefits from a reliable business continuity strategy that is fast to implement and ensures their entire staff can return to work within four to five hours, with critical staff members being able to continue working throughout. The company can rely on its Double-Take implementation to provide robust disaster recovery.

"One of the key objectives of our business continuity strategy was to increase the level of confidence in our back-up system. With Double-Take we are fully confident that data captured can be restored in an emergency," concluded Sillett.

About Vision Solutions

Vision Solutions, Inc. is the world's leading provider of information availability software and services for Windows, Linux, IBM Power Systems and Cloud Computing markets. Vision's trusted Double-Take®, MIMIX® and iTERA™ high availability and disaster recovery brands support business continuity, satisfy compliance requirements and increase productivity.

Affordable and easy-to-use, Vision products are backed by certified worldwide 24X7 customer support centres and a global partner network that includes IBM (NYSE:IBM), HP (NYSE:HPQ), Microsoft (NASDAQ:MSFT), VMware (NYSE:VMW) and Dell (NASDAQ:DELL).

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