



Hobby Distribution Firm Implements Solution for More Efficient, Manageable Storage Environment



THE CUSTOMER: HORIZON HOBBY

Headquartered in Champaign, Ill., Horizon Hobby, Inc., is an international marketer and distributor of radio control cars, boats, planes, model railroads, plastic and die-cast models, and other general hobby products. The organization supports its distribution efforts with retailer services to more than 2,000 hobby stores and direct-to-consumer marketing through print media and e-commerce. Horizon Hobby is also one of the leading developers of radio control hobby products, including Hangar 9 airplanes, HobbyZone entry level RC sports, and Team Losi cars and trucks.

THE ISSUE: LABOR INTENSE ENVIRONMENT

Horizon Hobby was experiencing multiple issues with the direct-attached storage for its Microsoft® SQL and Exchange data and file server files. With so many servers having attached storage, it was difficult to aggregate data on the health of the servers and keep track of system or drive failures. And there was considerable effort required in order to work with the vendor to replace disk. “We’re a 24 x 7 shop and don’t have time to jump through these hoops,” said Kevin Kelly, network systems manager for Horizon Hobby.

The backup and restore process was also extremely labor-intensive. IT staff had to constantly watch the drives during backups, monitoring for failures. For each individual restore, a staff member had to find the right tape, mount the tape, and then get the data back. A full Exchange restore could have left the organization without email for an entire day.

In addition, Horizon Hobby was not comfortable that its mission critical data could be recovered quickly in the event of an outage. The organization receives between 60 and 70 percent of its orders from hobby stores electronically, with the order information housed on the SQL servers. A significant amount of business also comes through the web site and that order information sits on the SQL servers as well. “It’s important that our SQL servers are up 24 x 7,” said Kelly.

INDUSTRY

Hobby product distribution

LOCATION

Champaign, Illinois

SOLUTION

Networked storage system with disk-based backup capabilities

DATALINK PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

- Analysis
- Design
- Implementation
- Support

BENEFITS

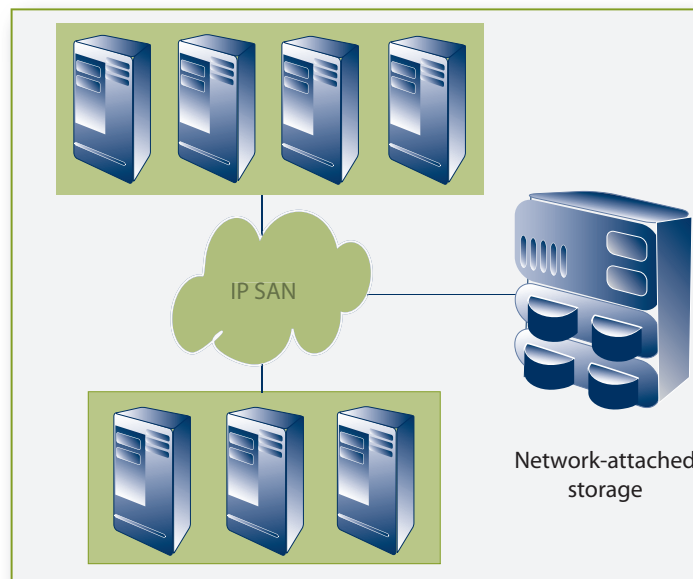
Provides fast and seamless backup and recovery of Exchange and SQL data. Eliminates time consuming storage management activities. Ensures high value data can be quickly restored if necessary.

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—Kevin Kelly
Network Systems Manager
Horizon Hobby

Beyond this, many of Horizon Hobby’s vendors are located in Asia. Because of the time difference, email is often the primary method of communication with them. “If we were out of the water for a day with email, it would severely impact our productivity,” Kelly said.

Horizon Hobby wanted to avoid wasting so many cycles on managing its storage environment—time that could be spent focusing on other, more important business objectives. The organization was also looking to minimize the risk of losing access to its high value data in the event of an outage.



The networked storage system provides seamless backup and recovery and greatly reduces cumbersome management activities.

THE SOLUTION: CONSOLIDATED STORAGE / DISK-BASED BACKUP AND RECOVERY

Horizon Hobby had been looking at a couple of technologies for quite some time but was not comfortable with all the aspects of those solutions. The organization then began working with Datalink, who analyzed Horizon Hobby’s current situation and listened to its business needs. Ultimately, Datalink suggested going down a different path. “We had a technical conversation with Datalink. We told them what we wanted and they recommended what would enable us to do what we wanted to do and meet all our needs,” said Kelly.

The organization implemented a Network Appliance Fabric Attached Storage (FAS) System with SnapManager® for Microsoft® Exchange and SnapManager® for Microsoft® SQL software. The solution provides networked storage in a CIFS and iSCSI storage protocol environment. It also offers quick and seamless disk-based backup and recovery. Currently, Horizon Hobby archives to tape for disaster recovery. Eventually though, the organization will implement another FAS system at a secondary site and utilize replication for disaster recovery purposes.

THE BENEFITS: FAST BACKUP AND RECOVERY AND EASE OF ADMINISTRATION

“With this solution, we have confidence not only that data is available but in a crisis we can be up and running and fixed quite quickly,” Kelly said.

For instance, it now takes only a couple of seconds to restore individual files, a process that previously took anywhere from ten minutes to a half hour. Recently, the organization had to restore the Exchange database and it took just 25 minutes. “We could have potentially been out of email for 24 hours in our old environment,” Kelly described.

The backup process is also a lot faster now. “We weren’t really able to get a full backup done in a day before. So we were perpetually a couple of days behind and had to switch jobs out to be able to keep the schedule,” said Don Elmore, network administrator. “Now, we’re able to do all the backups with plenty of time to spare. We don’t have to constantly manage the backup. We can set the schedule and know with confidence the backup will run during that time and then view the reports at our convenience. That saves us a ton of time,” he added. In fact previously, an administrator dedicated half of his time to managing backups. Now it requires only about five hours a week; and it’s a much less intense activity—browsing the reports versus constantly watching and monitoring the backups.

In fact, with the auto support (phone home) feature of the NetApp technology, the organization doesn’t have to worry about backups failing. “The one time we had a disk fail, Datalink called before I even knew it was offline—within 10 minutes of it happening,” Kelly said. “It was a Saturday and we were doing some work that caused one of our disk backups to fail on Exchange. The fact that somebody called us and said, ‘hey we want you to be aware of what we’re seeing,’ is pretty amazing. It’s like we have a third person watching this equipment and making sure it’s up and running. That in itself is worth huge amounts to us.”

The organization is also finding that it is very easy to allot additional disk space to areas within the company. “This gives us real flexibility because adding disk is usually unplanned,” Kelly said.

END RESULTS: SATISFIED EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS

From a business standpoint, the new solution offers a better experience for employees and customers, ultimately increasing productivity and satisfaction. “We noticed an increase in the speed of email. From a qualitative standpoint, end users are no longer complaining about slowdowns. We’ve also seen pretty significant performance improvements in our SQL servers. This increases the performance of our web site, which gives people a better user experience and can translate to some degree in more sales,” Elmore said.

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—Don Elmore
Network Administrator
Horizon Hobby



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