Rochford District Council Secures 25 Years' of History with Acronis®

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Setting the Scene

Rochford District Council is one of sixteen councils in Essex and, with a vision to be the place of choice to live, work and visit, it prides itself on delivering a high standard of services to its residents. This high standard is ingrained in its IT department which has a keen focus on cost-efficiency and reliability.

Like many local governmental organisations, the Council depends heavily on the continual availability of its IT systems. Having a reliable disaster recovery strategy in place is an essential component of the Council's IT strategy. However, with the recession and current mood of government austerity, there is mounting pressure to cut IT costs.

At Rochford District Council, everything from the planning department's information to the revenues and benefits data is stored in a digital environment which must be carefully protected. This information resides on 50 servers split equally between physical and virtual environments provided by HP and VMware. Approximately 65% of the council employee's computers use thin clients, with the rest using workstations.

Backups creep into the working day

The Council's backup strategy consisted of taking a backup each night starting at 6.00pm. The council was backing up overnight locally, the tapes were then stored at a remote, offsite location. Once the tapes were stored at the remote location, the remote location was then backed up and the tapes stored at Rochford District Council. The backups were being run to LTO 3 tapes which were consequently being transferred between different locations, from the offsite data centre to the cool server room onsite. Despite having a resilient plan, the backups were time consuming, often creeping into working hours impacting on staff productivity.

Organisation:
Rochford District Council

Sector:
Public Sector/Local council

Key challenges:
- Server recovery using existing backup and recovery tool was taking far too long
- A reliable backup and recovery solution was needed to protect data across physical and virtual environments
- More than 25 years' of local council historical data had to be protected, as well as growing volumes of newly created data that were being backed up every day
- Needed a solution that enabled disk-to-disk backup and recovery

Environment:
- 50 HP servers
- 50 VMware ESXi licences

Solution:
- 25 Acronis® Backup & Recovery™ 10 Advanced Server licences with optional deduplication
- 3 Acronis® Backup & Recovery™ Universal Restore™ licences
- 2 Acronis® Recovery™ for MS SQL Server licences
- 100 Acronis® Snap Deploy® 3 Workstation licences
- 1 Acronis® Disk Director Suite licence

Business Benefits:
- Faster backup time saves two hours of labour every day
- Deduplication feature saves 68% storage space, cutting storage costs and saving time
- Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 seamlessly integrates with VMware for protection across both physical and virtual environments
- Ability to back up disk-to-disk increases speed and reliability of backups

Rochford District Council had been using Veritas Backup Exec version 10 to back up its servers. The council uses SunGard Availability Services for its IT consultancy and an assessment by Barrie Madsen, contract manager for SunGard, found that the current server restore times were unacceptably long. In addition, the software did not support disk-to-disk backup which he assessed as being more reliable and faster than traditional tape methods.

Madsen decided to look for an alternative solution that could meet the backup, recovery and disk-to-disk needs of his hybrid physical and virtual server infrastructure. Madsen was particularly interested in evaluating solutions from Acronis, a robust backup and recovery brand he had been familiar with earlier in his career.

Testing, testing, testing

SunGard put Acronis's DR features to the test by running an exhaustive and intense two-day workshop where his IT team had to restore six live servers using Acronis Backup & Recovery 10. This task was accomplished by the Acronis software the first time and without any issues. "*The test found that Acronis could easily withstand the most vigorous of tests, living up to its reputation for reliability and robustness*," said Madsen.

SunGard proceeded to install the Acronis software across the Council's entire server infrastructure as part of a comprehensive ongoing disaster recovery project. Having initially installed the previous version of Acronis' software, SunGard advised Rochford to upgrade to 25 Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 licenses. Madsen recalls installation as being particularly smooth process and the support team was particularly helpful.

Since installing the solution, Rochford District Council has been extremely pleased with the benefits, with at least a couple of hours of time being saved every day. Madsen explains that, "*With Acronis Backup & Recovery 10, we can now do a lot more with the same amount of equipment. We have knocked hours off our day. This is due to two factors. Firstly, we can back up to disk to an image server, which is then backed up to tape so we can store the backups off site. Backing up to disk is much speedier than the previous process. Secondly, we deployed Acronis' deduplication option which had some benefits which we had not previously examined. Whereas previously backups were creeping into our working hours, now they are complete by 4.00am each morning. The solution works with 100% success rate.*"

The software has also had an impact on the end users in the council. A lot of helpdesk calls used to concern the accidental deletion or misplacement of files. Previously, to restore a single file typically took about three hours if it was to be recovered from the tape. Now the IT staff can recover a file in a couple of minutes if it is stored on the image server.

Another added benefit for a budget-conscious establishment such as Rochford District Council, is the competitive licensing offered by Acronis. Madsen was surprised by just how economical Acronis was. "*It's all about the tax payer's money at the end of the day. We are responsible for sourcing 100% reliable and efficient software at minimal cost and Acronis' upgrade and renewal programmes are particularly competitive on price.*" Acronis also had other cost saving benefits in store for Rochford District Council once the council started testing its deduplication option.

Unexpected Cost Savings: 68% of Data Deduped

One of the more unexpected benefits of Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 was the deduplication option which was not part of the initial project criteria. The council uses the solution on all backups to the main data server which holds data such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel documents. The council takes a full backup once a week as well as incremental daily backups with each backup being deduped. The benefits are two-fold. Firstly, the council is saving costs through cutting its disk space requirements; secondly it is saving time by making high speed backups so the systems are no longer being backed up until 4am in the morning.

Rochford Council use the deduplication feature on a daily basis and Madsen estimates that it helps to save them, on average, two hours per day. For a typical vault , of which the Council has 6, Madsen estimates that the deduplication efficiency can reach around 68% with data cut from around 500GB to less than 200GB, a space and time saving that Madsen has been extremely impressed by.

Protection in both physical and virtual worlds

The Council is also using VMware for virtualization and found that the Acronis software works extremely well with VMware's ESXi servers. "*Being able to restore physical to virtual regardless of the virtualisation platform is a key selling point for us. In the likely occasion that a physical backup does fail, we can restore on the virtual server,*" said Madsen. "*Virtualization is a great cost saving technology, but we want to be secure that the data on these virtual machines is constantly available and fully protected. Virtual solutions don't always provide this peace of mind which is why we chose to use Acronis for both physical and virtual recovery.*"

The Future

Acronis continues to work closely with Rochford District Council in securing 100% of the backups and safe-guarding twenty-five years' worth of council history. Madsen concludes: "*Acronis' software has proven itself in a challenging environment. We rely on the software every day and it has never let us down. It is the ideal product that is easy to install, works well and ultimately that we can rely on backup and recover any data quickly and efficiently.*"

About Rochford District Council

Rochford District Council's vision is to make Rochford a place which provides opportunities for the best possible quality of life for all who live, work and visit here. To help us realise our vision, the Council has adopted four principal objectives. These are:

- making a difference to our people
- making a difference to our community
- making a difference to our environment
- making a difference to our local economy

For more information please visit: http://www.rochford.gov.uk/.

About SunGard Availability Services

SunGard Availability Services delivers secure, resilient IT infrastructure and organisational availability services through a unique combination of scalable, managed IT production environments and Workplace Recovery centres, with the added benefit of remote access solutions for your workforce: Connected via our private network across our multiple locations and all supported by experience gained from five decades of keeping businesses resilient. http://www.sungard.co.uk.

About Acronis

Acronis is a leading provider of easy-to-use backup, recovery and security solutions for physical, virtual and cloud environments. Its patented disk imaging technology enables corporations, SMBs and consumers to protect their digital assets. With Acronis' disaster recovery, deployment and migration software, users protect their digital information, maintain business continuity and reduce downtime. Acronis software is sold in more than 180 countries and available in 13 languages. For additional information, www.acronis.co.uk. Follow Acronis on Twitter: http://twitter.com/acronis.

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