

MIDSTATE MEDICAL CENTER SPEEDS RECOVERY, SAVES HOURS IN IT MANAGEMENT

“Thanks to EVault, we saved a full eight-hour day

per week over what we used to do... Backups and restores are much faster. It took us less than five minutes to restore a critical database—without ever needing to call EVault Support. That would probably have taken us two hours with tape.”

Growth, change and leading-edge technological innovation are cornerstones of life at Connecticut’s MidState Medical Center. Consisting of a full-service, 130-bed acute-care hospital and several satellites offices, MidState Medical metamorphosed from a local community hospital into a world-class medical facility affiliated with the larger Hartford Healthcare network. The medical center boasts patient satisfaction ranked in the top 10% of hospitals nationwide and among the top three hospitals in Connecticut.

For MidState Medical’s Information Services group, however, rapid growth hasn’t always been easy. “We grew mostly from a file/print server data center to now supporting over 100 servers with multiple interfaces and applications,” said Jennifer Comerford, MidState Medical’s director of information services. MidState’s team initially envisioned that many of its IT needs would be addressed by Hartford Healthcare’s larger enterprise IS department, but instead learned it would have to handle some of them locally.

Comerford’s team had to evolve from an on-call support crew to one performing more complex management and oversight of growing systems, applications and end users across various medical and administrative groups. Ensuring the availability of emerging applications and protecting patients’ critical data became a thorny issue, complicated by the growing inefficiency of the medical center’s tape-based backup infrastructure. MidState needed a change.

Goals

MidState Medical’s tape-based backup woes began innocently enough, progressing from the relatively benign use of a tape drive for backups to a more robust HP-based automated tape library with DLT tapes and 10-tape cartridge magazines.

“The process was working great years ago before we acquired all of these new systems to support,” said IT Manager Tom Cashman. According to Cashman, the onslaught of data and systems needing protection soon translated into almost-daily tape magazine change-outs, incomplete backups, unsatisfactory restore times and extra manual work by him and his team of IT consultants.

Anticipating the hospital’s growth plans, which included IS initiatives to account for disaster recovery and data security, Comerford’s team decided it was time to investigate a new backup solution that would let them:

- Reduce the time it took to back up all their servers
- Automate the data retention process
- Eliminate manual steps
- Perform faster restores, without the risk of corrupted data
- Set up secure, offsite recovery

Customer Snapshot

Name

MidState Medical Center

Line of Business

Healthcare – Community Hospital

Location

Meriden, Connecticut

Product

EVault InfoStage™, EVault InfoStage DualVault plus Agent plug-ins for Microsoft SQL Server, Oracle on Windows and Novell Network.

Configuration

Over 100 servers – mostly Microsoft Windows, some Novell servers. Most run Oracle or SQL Server database applications and Windows file shares.

Capacity

2 Terabytes

Goals

- Faster, more complete backups
- Faster, more reliable restores
- Reduce manual steps for backup
- More automated data retention policy
- Offsite recovery with security safeguards

Challenges

- Cumbersome, incomplete tape backups
- Frequent tape/magazine change-outs
- Lengthy restores, corrupted backup tapes
- Small IT staff burdened by backup tasks

Solutions

EVault’s unique InfoStage DualVault functionality speeds backups and restores from hours to just a few minutes. It also secures backups to a secondary, secure disk-based vault at another location

Results

- Saved eight hours per week in IT management time
- Reduced complex database backups from several hours to as little as five minutes
- Cut full-server backup times by several hours

Challenges

As it turned out, the frequent change-out of tapes and cartridge magazines represented the “tip of the iceberg” when it came to MidState Medical’s backup issues. IT consultants Eric Kamens and Enzo Pistritto found themselves having to juggle these duties, along with the need to occasionally repair a robotic arm on the tape library, cover for tape failures, and halt backup jobs before completion when they began to eat into the next morning’s peak work time.

Babysitting the backups began to reduce productivity as this small IT crew strove to perform other tasks like server builds and managing new IT projects. “It was almost a full-time job sometimes: Retrieving tapes, changing out tapes, and dealing with tape failures we were having as well,” said Comerford. “We’d also go back to tape and find out we didn’t get a good backup for 20 days or a month.”

Besides the management burden faced by the IT staff, there was a larger question of how well current backup methods were really protecting the medical center’s data—and especially whether it would be easy to recover in the event of a disruption. Recovery problems were particularly acute, said Cashman: “I felt the pain of using tapes most during recovery. It would take hours and hours to recover.”

Comerford added: “We had to rely on the backup software to tell us to go get Tape X and Magazine Y. Then, you’d be lucky if that tape existed in the magazine. More often than not you’d have to go offsite and retrieve the right tape.”

And, since the backup jobs routinely overran the nightly backup window, the team also had to be more selective in what it chose to back up. “We weren’t backing up optimally. We were cherry-picking and did a lot of that in the last few months before we brought EVault onboard,” she said. This led to questions about how the Medical Center could successfully protect its data to satisfy its retention policies and regulatory requirements. “We started to wonder what would happen with our retention within a year. How would we bring something back?” Pistritto said.

Solutions

The team discovered EVault InfoStage after doing some research on the Internet. “What turned me onto the product was the dual-vault concept involving backup to disk—having something onsite as well as offsite. We were moving in the direction of having an offsite data center already,” said Kamens. “In looking at other backup solutions, we also didn’t see many with encryption on the backend like EVault. We liked that EVault also offered encryption over-the-wire.”

After contacting EVault and seeing a demo of EVault InfoStage™ and EVault InfoStage DualVault solution, it didn’t take long for MidState Medical’s IT crew to envision a better life—for themselves and their backup data. Comerford also liked the automatic notifications and alerts EVault provides to help the team identify when a backup fails or when backup systems need some other attention.

Once the purchase order was signed, the team wanted to implement EVault as soon as possible. Within 24 hours of the initial “seed,” the medical center’s server data was safely backed up to an EVault disk-based vault located in a data center at the facility. “We were able to do full seeds of the data during the course of the workday, without affecting the users,” said Comerford, noting that they also plan to propose a separate vault at the medical center’s remote site 15 miles away. They knew that after performing the initial seed, backup times would be a lot quicker since EVault DeltaPro™ technology captures and transmits only data blocks changed since the last backup.

“EVault came back in the next day after the implementation just to make sure everything was correct and to help us set up the retention schedule. It was really a painless process,” said Pistritto.

Results

Since implementing EVault InfoStage and EVault InfoStage DualVault, the difference in backup and restore times has been substantial. The backup coverage has also gone from spotty to complete. “Unlike cherry-picking the way we used to do, we’ve gone to backing up entire servers,” said Cashman. Novell servers that used take over eight hours to back up are now being backed up in just a few hours.

Restore times have also been phenomenally fast. In one case, an end-user mistakenly deleted a portion of the fund development department’s database. Needless to say, they were eager to get it restored as soon as possible. EVault didn’t disappoint. “We restored the database in less than five minutes without even calling for support. That’s how nice the product is,” said Pistritto. They were rewarded for their efforts with a plate of cookies by the appreciative end-user.

In all, Cashman estimates the time they now save on backup management tasks is significant. “Thanks to EVault, we saved a full eight-hour day per week over what we used to do.”



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