

Case Study

The Stokes Partnership

Clarity IT Advisors

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Project Outline

The Stokes Partnership, TSP, in a period of sustained growth recognised that in order to facilitate and manage that growth they needed to address two important issues:



✓ Improve Data Storage

TSP's requirements were growing rapidly due to the increased use of electronic documents and archiving

✓ Improve Business Continuity

Ensure that TSP could continue to operate and address the needs their customers even in extreme circumstances

TSP looked to their IT partners and consultants Sceptre Networking and Clarity IT Advisors to recommend and implement a solution.

The Solution

Sceptre Networking and Clarity IT Advisors identified that the project needed to be split into two distinct phases. Phase 1 would address storage capacity and resilience issue and prepare TSP for phase 2. Phase 2 will use virtualisation to achieve outstanding levels of availability across TSP's entire IT system.

The first step of phase 1 was to carry out an in-depth survey of TSP's IT system and how it was being used. This allowed us to identify exactly how much data TSP had and how fast it was growing. Using this information it was possible to calculate bandwidth requirements, hardware and ultimately design a solution for TSP.

"We knew that we had to take a proactive approach to business continuity and disaster recovery in order to safeguard our clients, the system put in place gives us maximum availability and resilience at a fraction of the cost downtime or data loss would cause."

Jonathan Stokes, Partner

We recommended implementing a Storage Area Network (SAN) based on SANmelody from DataCore because of its advanced data handling and protection capabilities. A SAN was ideal solution for TSP:

Highly Resilient to Failure

SANs can store data in multiple, physical separate locations. Combined with 'multi-path' technology that connects servers and SAN together using two or more routes. Even the loss of a key component, SAN unit or an entire building does not cause any disruption, loss of data or even an error on the servers.

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Customer Profile

The Stokes Partnership is a law firm based in Crewkerne, Somerset that specialises in litigation, commercial and residential property, private clients, corporate and family services. Since opening in May 1998 their growth has been phenomenal; six-fold in ten years. They are currently based in the centre of the town and occupy several buildings.

The Stokes Partnership has always embraced technology recognising it can help manage their growth and keep them effective and competitive.

"Technology plays a major part in our practice. The respect that we've earned over the last decade has been built on the care and service we provide our clients. By implementing cutting edge business continuity solutions we know that our customers' will continue to put their faith in The Stokes Partnership"

**Jonathan Stokes
Partner**

For more information
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DataCore SANmelody

- ✓ Uses thin-provisioning to provide an almost unlimited number of 2TB drives to servers
- ✓ Integrates with Windows VSS to take instant snapshots of volumes
- ✓ Provides highly available storage directly to servers
- ✓ Supports Multi-Pathing and Real-time Mirroring to constantly protect data
- ✓ Provides "Enterprise Class" levels of resilience
- ✓ Can snapshot entire 2TB volumes in seconds for backup to tape or disk
- ✓ Upgradeable to replicate all data on the SAN across the Internet to a Disaster Recovery (DR) standby SAN

Clear Solutions to
Complex Problems

Ideal Storage Platform for Virtualisation

Virtualisation of servers is important to many organisations because it not only reduces hardware, software and running costs but it also provides excellent Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery options. If a host server fails, the virtual machines it was running can simply be configured to run on another host server. For this to work the new host server must be able to access the same storage as the original host. A SAN not only makes this very easy to accomplish but enables it to be achieved instantly as well.

Instant Real-time Backups

SANs can 'snapshot' data creating an instant backup. Snapshots can be used to quickly restore individual files or entire hard disks and because they are independent you can back them up to tape without interrupting or slowing down normal IT operations. Backups can run 24 hours a day if need be.

Superior Utilisation of Storage Space

As with many organisations, TSP's servers had varying amounts of free storage space available. Files were often moved between servers to try to ensure that no server ran out of space. As the amount of data being stored increased this juggling act became more frequent and difficult. SANs use their physical storage collectively and space can be allocated to servers according to need. Servers are simply assigned more space as and when they need it.

Implementing the Solution

It was decided to use Fibre Channel (FC) connections instead of iSCSI between the servers and the SAN units because of its exceptionally high performance and resilience to failure. All the equipment that made up the SAN was assembled and tested thoroughly before being taken to site. The tests included simulated failure of key components and even an entire SAN unit.

The SAN was installed in two of TSP's buildings and re-tested to ensure it worked still correctly in the live environment. As this was a highly productive, live environment interruption and downtime was avoided by our engineers working out of office hours and at the weekend to migrate the data from the existing storage in the servers to the new SAN. Only one server per evening was migrated to ensure that any changes could be quickly reversed.

Snapshots were configured to take images of TSP's data three times a day allowing them to rollback very quickly and easily if they experienced sudden data loss or malicious / accidental damage.

Project Results

The Stokes Partnership is delighted with their new storage system. Time is no longer lost juggling free storage space and backups to tape are much quicker and easier using the snapshots provided by the SAN.

"At the end of the installation we were secure in the knowledge that our data was now held in a highly resilient system. A major portion of our operation works in a paperless environment and data security is critical." Jonathan Stokes, Partner

TSP are confident that when they are ready to progress to virtualisation they have a solid foundation upon which to build.



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