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Industry-leading Building Company Protects Microsoft® Exchange Email Servers Against Disasters

Tocci Building Corporation chose Acronis® Recovery™ for Microsoft Exchange, saves $75,000

Tocci Building Corporation is a major East Coast US builder. While the firm pays homage to great buildings of the past with a striking landmark 19th-century industrial building used for its headquarters, it routinely employs the latest thinking in building techniques for client projects. As the company works to keep up with the demands of its customers, Tocci views the company's Microsoft Exchange server as too important to the company's day-to-day operations to entrust it to a tape-based backup and recovery system.

Email the main communication medium. As Brian Bouchard, Tocci's information technology director, points out, "We're always communicating by email, and it surpasses all other forms of communication. Our Microsoft Exchange 2003 mailbox stores are huge. We have bid applications going out. We have deadlines and contracts that need to be signed."

Approximately 60 of Tocci's 100 employees at the firm's Woburn headquarters would be affected if the company's Microsoft Exchange server needed to be taken offline. This is precisely what happened not long before the company retired its Symantec® Backup Exec® backup and recovery application. Unexpectedly, the Exchange server ran out of disk space due to the number of large files being sent through the server. Bouchard was forced to take it offline, offloading the files so they could be compressed, and in some cases, deleted. Compression alone took 12-18 hours.

Bouchard estimates that the total 36 hours of downtime Tocci experienced may have cost the company more than $75,000 in productivity. This event triggered the need to find a better backup and recovery solution.

"I went to a couple of Acronis Webinars in 2008 and learned they would be doing something with Exchange," Bouchard says. "So when Acronis Recovery for Microsoft Exchange was introduced in September 2008, we were one of the first companies to learn about it from our Acronis sales representative. We downloaded and tested it immediately. After I completed a backup and full recovery to prove it worked, we created a purchase order."

Immediate improvements. Acronis Recovery for Exchange was installed in September 2008 to support the Exchange server. Tocci saw immediate improvements. For instance, Acronis' industry-leading compression technology:
- allows much more data to be backed up to the company's Iomega® RAID 5 SATA drives.
- has slowed new disk purchases, saving capital resources, and
- completes backups much faster than the tape-based system it replaces, so the backup window can be kept very small.

Company:
Tocci Building Corporation
Woburn, Massachusetts
www.tocci.com

Industry:
Construction

Key Challenge:
- Protect the company's heavily-used Microsoft Exchange communications
- Create a VMware environment
- Ensure IT continuity by creating a remote disaster recovery site

Environment:
- 13 Dell servers, multiple IBM servers, large collection of off-the-shelf and custom workstations
- NetApps storage systems
- Multiple line-of-business applications including Microsoft Exchange, Prolog, Active Directory, Timberline accounting, domain controller

Solution:
- Acronis Recovery for Microsoft Exchange
- Acronis True Image Echo Server

Business Benefits:
- Recovers Exchange emails in moments, servers in minutes
- Speeds recovery to a remote server
- Simplified migration from physical to virtual servers

Moreover, Acronis Recovery allows granular restores from database backups. As a result, Tocci no longer has to carry out the inherently slow brick-level backups once required to recover individual emails as well as mailboxes. Restores can be carried out by individual users, courtesy of a user-friendly interface. "Of course, you want to be sure you can trust that a backup and restore product will work when you need it. But Acronis also helps free administrators to carry out other tasks," Bouchard explains.

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>
> -Brian Bouchard, IT Director

Since bringing its Exchange environment under Acronis Recovery protection, Tocci hasn't experienced a failure. Still, it regularly tests the system. For instance, Bouchard checked a backup recently by deleting a file and then attempted to recover it. "Let me tell you, it was click, boom and it was back in there again, thank you. Acronis is fast. You can back up any instances you want and compress files by almost 60%," he says.

Acronis to help build a virtualized remote failover site.
Protecting the company's Exchange environment is just one of the uses Tocci makes of Acronis software. The builder has made heavy investments in Virtual Design and Construction (VDC), creating and building information models (BIM) of which are all running on 13 Dell® servers and one powerful IBM® Windows server. With so much riding on the availability of these servers for both internal and external users, Tocci is turning to Acronis True Image Echo software in 2009 to help increase server efficiency and protect applications from potential disaster.

Bouchard was able to make a case both for virtualizing the servers and for building a remote site to be used in case of disaster. Working with the large IBM 16 gigabyte server with a 1U form factor that Tocci purchased in 2008, and adding a pair of larger 2U form factor IBM servers in 2009, the IT team has begun virtualizing line-of-business servers running Microsoft Exchange, Prolog®, DNS, Active Directory, print and file serv-ers, a Timberline® accounting system for construction, and a domain controller. Acronis True Image Echo backup and restore software will be used to directly convert and import backed up servers stored in an Acronis image file to the VMware Virtual Machine Disk (VMDK) format, allowing physical servers to be migrated seamlessly into virtual machines. Data will be stored on a six-terabyte NetApps® storage system.

Late in the year, a remote site will be built not far from headquarters, linked at high speeds by fiber cable and anchored by a three-terabyte NetApps storage system. The company will use Acronis True Image Echo to repurpose some of the decommissioned Dell servers from headquarters to host 14 VMware servers, imaging the VMware servers at headquarters and restoring them at the remote site, ready to take over in case of headquarters failure. The major project is currently expected to be completed at the end of 2009.

Once the remote site is operational, the company will be able to tolerate a failure on the Prolog server, knowing its remote twin has been receiving incremental backups continuously from headquarters. "The remote server can be up and running again in under a half hour, usually in about 15 minutes even in the event of a significant failure," Bouchard says. "Compare this with the many hours time it would take to recover to a remote system from tape."

System expected to pay for itself. While Bouchard hasn't had an opportunity to estimate savings that will follow from the virtualization effort, he expects the new system will pay for itself in reducing overall costs of maintenance and administration. More important, Bouchard knows that the company will be well positioned to keep IT running in a busy environment where failure could otherwise have a drastic effect on company operations. "If, for instance, the Prolog SQL server goes down," says Bouchard, "that translates into lost productivity for about 50 employees at a fully burdened cost of hundreds of dollars an hour per person, and it affects our customers adversely. Acronis prevents that from happening."

Positive feelings continue. Bouchard's positive feelings for Acronis' offerings have not changed over the time he's dealt with the software maker. "Our understanding of the status quo – how other backup utility companies made their products work – was reversed when Acronis came to our attention. Although they have an imaging product, they didn't say they were in business for imaging, but instead said they offered a qualified enterprise solution for backup that can compete against the big boys. They always give us a timely response when we contact them, even though we're a smaller company."