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CASE STUDY >
EDUCATION: FURMAN UNIVERSITY

CASE STUDY

Making Problems (not documents) Disappear

It is a time honored tradition among college students to attend class armed with elaborately contrived tales of why they failed to turn in an assignment. But academic institutions are not given the luxury to simply fabricate falsehoods regarding the disappearance of student records or academic data. Rather, universities and colleges are expected to have all pertinent student, faculty and financial data safely secured and readily available. That is why Furman University, a prestigious institution of 2,600 under-graduates and 230 faculty members, entrusted STORServer to serve as its backup solution.

The Challenge:

In 2006, Russell Ensley, systems administrator for Furman University, was looking to upgrade from an outmoded data storage solution with the overall goal of improving the management and protection of the university's data center operations.

Looking to broaden the scope of what he was able to do with the university's antiquated grandfather-father-son backup system, Ensley wanted to implement a new disk-to-disk –to-tape technology that would help cut costs, save time and minimize the backup window.

The Solution:

"The amount of data being generated by the university was growing fast, while at the same pace our backup system was aging on a hardware level. It became essential for us to upgrade our software and graduate to a new data backup system," said Ensley. "We researched a number of different solutions, but ultimately found that the STORServer Enterprise Backup Appliance (EBA) had everything we needed packaged together."

STORServer Enterprise Backup Appliances are scalable, fully integrated solutions for backup, archive and disaster recovery. Each of its appliances includes appropriately architected and sized hardware, software and services.

Notable among the EBA's benefits is its compatibility with a vast array of operating systems. With the ability to seamlessly integrate with almost any interface including Windows, Linux, UNIX, MAC and more, STORServer is perfect for a university setting in which students and faculty run

on a myriad of operating systems. In addition, Ensley liked that the STORServer EBA is built on IBM's Tivoli Storage Manager (TSM) system, but packaged in an all-in-one solution.

"We backup everything from business and financial to academic data including student grades and professor research," said Ensley. "It is immensely important for us to have a versatile backup solution that is capable of storing a variety of media files. With the STORServer EBA, we can easily back up any file type you can imagine."

Another important element that academic institutions must carefully consider when selecting a backup solution is the ability to backup massive amounts of data in a timely manner.

"The academic environment is unique in that professors need to store more archival data than most corporations," said Ensley. "Many organizations rely on universities as repositories of intelligence and information, including research and scientific data led by students and professors, so it becomes essential to ensure that that precious data is protected."

But protecting data using an inefficient backup solution can be a crippling drain on time and resources. Rather than performing incremental backups manually, Ensley now uses the STORServer EBA database to do it for him.

Results:

"The biggest beauty of the STORServer EBA is that it reduces the amount of time we spend swapping out and keeping track of more than 90 tapes," said Ensley. "With the old solution, our incremental daily tape backups would take more than an hour of my time every day. The STORServer EBA has dramatically reduced the time it takes for me to manage the backups daily to just 10 minutes."

Ensley is also quick to note that although Furman University has never dealt with a total system loss, the STORServer EBA has successfully restored every document from accidental deletion. In addition to using the EBA for daily backup and restores, Ensley also uses it for a disaster recovery level of backup which stores data in separate pools. With a reliable disaster recovery system, the STORServer EBA stores data for the university both on campus, and at an offsite facility.

“We know that our data is safe with STORServer,” said Ensley. “But we also know that if a problem arises or we need technical support, we have the right channels to connect directly to somebody that will help. It’s a great reassurance to know that if we need assistance, there is always someone available from STORServer to help.”

Performing backups consisting of more than 300 gigabytes every night and maintaining more than three terabytes of archived data, Furman University has saved roughly \$25,000 in labor cost over the past three years since implementing the STORServer Enterprise Backup Appliance.

A final big selling point for Ensley was what he learned from the videos produced by STORServer. They discuss the mechanics of how the appliance works and introduced him to many of the concepts employed by STORServer to provide the unique and valuable benefits that come with the Enterprise Backup Appliance. In addition, the STORServer training class Ensley attended in Colorado Springs was one of the best technical classes he says he has attended in his 15 years of working in IT.

“STORServer is built on a big player’s system, but is packaged in a way that makes it easier to implement,” said Ensley. “That makes it an incredibly valuable resource for any academic institution.”



ABOUT STORSERVER

STORServer, Inc., headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO is a leading provider of data backup solutions for the mid-market. We offer a complete suite of appliances, software, and services that solve today’s backup, archive and disaster recovery challenges. For more information on STORServer, please visit the company’s website at www.storserver.com.

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