

Case Study

Carmarthenshire County Council

SIMPANA



Customer Profile

Carmarthenshire County Council aims to provide high quality services to its subjects, and is constantly seeking to make Carmarthenshire a better place in which to live and work.

It is also one of the largest and most diverse employers in South West Wales, counting some 9,000 employees in its payroll. It is managed by some 74 elected councilors, and it is these people that agree on the Council's policies and spending priorities.

Carmarthenshire has the fourth highest population out of the 22 local authorities within Wales and accounts for 6 percent of the total Welsh population.

In order to better serve its population and help its staff work to the best of their abilities the Council recently took the opportunity to review its storage and archive infrastructure.

The Challenge

The Council, like many other organisations of its kind, generates a huge amount of data that its existing systems were struggling to cope with. At the beginning of the project it was dealing with issues with backup, the sprawl of systems, and the amount of storage and space that they were using.

The Council's main objectives were to reduce its data landscape, and if possible, use virtualisation technologies. As a government body it had to make sure that it was meeting strict compliance and data protection legislation. It had to replace its system.

Sarita Bennett, business analyst at Carmarthenshire County Council, said that data recovery had been considered "tricky", explaining that it had never been tested.

The backups failure rate was becoming a concern and the server room was already at full capacity. On top of this it would take some 12 to 14 hours to backup before these failures were even discovered. And, the already busy IT department was facing ever-increasing demand. Bennett said, "We needed to virtualise storage and servers to reduce surplus capacity prevalent in stove pipe datacentre."

The Council began to look at alternate vendor solutions, at that time it was using VERITAS systems, and began drawing up a list of requirements. Bennett said that central control and management, as well as the flexibility to grow were key considerations, as was the desire to adopt new technologies.

"We wanted the ease of adopting new data management capabilities whilst utilising shared / tiered storage as well as being hardware agnostic. We were looking for the Best of Breed."

The Council short listed four companies and invited them to tender, examining each product set carefully and assessing them with key performance criteria in mind.

Bennett explained, "We wanted to have a data protection solution which was hardware agnostic and this element had a high weighting within the original tender response."

The Solution

Carmarthenshire County Council decided on a system which would help with the virtualisation of storage and servers and meet the key requirements as outlined in the tender. It looked at the system carefully, using a reseller to build a proof of concept system for evaluation.

On inspection, Bennett said that CommVault's data protection and storage tool and Hitachi AMS storage systems were most impressive.

The Council now has two data centres, each with a SAN utilising Hitachi AMS storage. The storage is based on fibre channel and provides SATA storage capacity for backup to disk libraries. A disk library is available in each data centre and the data protection solution utilises an auxiliary copy of the disk libraries at the alternate data centres. This provides the Council with automated offsite archive on a daily basis.

Importantly, for the Council, the implementation, which has enabled the use of a Blade virtualised server infrastructure has led to a reduction in server and storage capacity wastage.

Bennett said that this had also resulted in a carbon footprint reduction of 70 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

The Results

Where before disaster recovery was prone to disaster itself, now recoveries take minutes to achieve, and, Bennett said, the council is able to place retention policies on that data, an option that was out of its reach before. As a rule, she added, "Disaster recovery is much improved due to centralisation and rigorous testing and can be demonstrated within 11 minutes."

The CommVault software also allows the help desk to handle many forms of recoveries as what Bennett called a 'usual function' as opposed to being the long drawn out and prone-to-disaster process they used to be.

"Recovery from disk is now something considered as trivial compared to previous solution and the amount of effort that was then required. Recovery of file and print, Exchange objects or SharePoint is now down from half a day to minutes", Bennett added.

It takes just five minutes to restore a single file or e-mail, one hour to restore a 100Gb file system or Exchange mail-store, and half a day to restore an entire server, all timelines that were once out of reach at the Council.

As well as the improvements in the Council's green agenda, it has also helped it to meet data protection and compliance regulations, something that gets equal attention in the modern age.

Bennett said that CommVault has helped the Council to reduce the time taken to service Freedom of Information requests, which were constantly increasing and had been a considerable draw on IT, the freedom of information officers and IT security officer.

Steven Rose, EMEA CommVault Vice President, said, "Councils must manage a huge amount of information, and this information must be stored, managed and retrieved in a secure and speedy manner. CommVault has helped Carmarthenshire to reduce its IT administration and increase its efficiency. We are delighted to have helped it dramatically reduce its backup and recovery times. And as it grows, which it will, so will the CommVault Solution."

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