



Overview

Country or Region: Australia

Industry: Financial services—Financial management

Customer Profile

FSA Group is Australia's leading provider of debt solutions to individuals and businesses. Headquartered in Sydney, it has 160 employees and had 2008 revenues of AU\$36.29 million (U.S.\$25.07 million).

Business Situation

As part of an effort to streamline IT operations by standardizing on Windows Server® 2003 and other core Microsoft® software, FSA Group needed to better protect and manage its information assets.

Solution

FSA Group deployed the CommVault Simpana unified data-management solution, which includes Microsoft SQL Server® 2005 and advanced content-based search and indexing capabilities from FAST, a Microsoft subsidiary.

Benefits

- Provides easy integration
- Supports compliance requirements
- Speeds data retrieval
- Lowers IT costs
- Offers virtually 100 percent reliability

Data Management Software Helps Australian Debt-Solutions Firm Streamline IT, Cut Costs

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Fred El-Tahche, Chief Information Officer, FSA Group

FSA Group serves Australians who need help controlling their debt. In mid-2007, the company redesigned its outdated IT environment to offer enterprise-class capabilities, standardizing on Windows Server® 2003, Microsoft® Exchange Server 2003, and other core Microsoft software. These improvements led to rapid growth in the data the company had to manage. To address this challenge, FSA Group worked with CommVault—a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner—to deploy CommVault Simpana software for data management, archiving, replication, and resource management. Using technology from FAST—a Microsoft subsidiary—Simpana also offers rapid content-based indexing and searching. Now, FSA Group retrieves archived documents in seconds instead of hours, saves about 40 hours a month on user requests, has achieved 99.999 percent uptime, and has simplified the path for upgrading its core Microsoft software.

Situation

When Australians need help controlling their debt, they often turn to FSA Group for solutions. Consumer solutions—offered through the company's Fox Symes subsidiary—include budgeting assistance, informal creditor negotiations, arrangement of third-party consolidation loans, and bankruptcy assistance. Solutions for businesses with short-term cash flow problems—offered through the company's 180 Group subsidiary—include consulting and third-party financing services. Based in Sydney, the company has 160 employees.

In mid-2007, FSA Group needed to upgrade its IT environment to meet growing business demand. The company brought in a new Chief Information Officer and other IT talent to completely redesign the IT infrastructure to offer enterprise-class capabilities. "When I first came to FSA, there wasn't an enterprise approach to technology, and there were no enterprise-grade products," explains Fred El-Tahche, Chief Information Officer at FSA Group. "The environment included older commodity servers and outdated software, and systems routinely went down."

Over the next few months, the IT team undertook several projects, including standardizing the environment on the Windows Server® 2003 Enterprise Edition operating system, upgrading Microsoft® Exchange Server version 5.5 to Microsoft Exchange Server 2003, and replacing 90 percent of the server computers with IBM BladeCenter blade servers. The company also deployed an IBM N Series (NetApp) network-attached storage system and standardized employee computers on the Windows® XP Professional operating system and Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003.

As these new and much more efficient systems moved into production, FSA Group experienced a common challenge that many

growing enterprises confront: the rapid expansion of information assets and of the data-storage resources required to support them. El-Tahche says, "Employees were suddenly able to share and copy documents more than ever before, which was great for collaboration, but handling all the unmanaged and unstructured data became a big IT issue pretty quickly."

Also, to meet compliance policies, FSA Group often needs to locate all previously archived documents related to a particular account, transaction, customer, and so on. However, the company's existing third-party backup software was not well-suited to locating archived records based on their content.

The company needed a data management solution that could index, store, and rapidly retrieve documents; manage storage resources efficiently; integrate with the Windows environment; and scale with continued business growth.

Solution

FSA Group chose the CommVault Simpana suite of software as its new unified data-management solution. Simpana offers integrated, enterprise-class data archiving, replication, searching, and resource-management capabilities. FSA Group chose Simpana for its comprehensive functionality and because it is optimized for 64-bit Windows environments and tightly integrates with the company's upgraded IT systems.

Another factor in the solution's favor was the solid performance of CommVault software that El-Tahche had witnessed in the past. "We went with CommVault pretty much straightaway, given the positive experience we had in a similar transition at my previous employer," he says.

Additional solution components, automatically installed by Simpana, include

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Microsoft SQL Server® 2005 Enterprise Edition data management software and an indexing engine from FAST, which gives Simpana its rapid content-based search capabilities. FAST is a subsidiary of Microsoft, and its FAST ESP technology is a leading enterprise search platform.

FSA Group also chose CommVault as an IT partner to help deploy the solution. CommVault is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner that develops solutions for high-performance, simplified data management and universal availability. FSA Group deployed Simpana concurrently with the latter phase of its overall IT upgrade in late 2007. The new data-management solution and the new IT systems it supports were fully up and running in February 2008—less than six months after the IT upgrade had begun.

Benefits

By deploying CommVault Simpana in an environment that’s standardized on Windows Server and other core Microsoft infrastructure software, including Exchange Server 2003 and SQL Server 2005, FSA Group enjoys integrated IT systems that are easy to manage. With its new data-management solution, the company is able to locate archived records quickly, meet compliance requirements, manage storage resources more efficiently, and reduce costs.

Provides Easy Integration, Simplifies IT Management

As part of its overall IT upgrade, FSA Group deployed integrated and standardized systems, which makes them easier to manage. This is why the company chose Windows operating systems and Microsoft core infrastructure technologies. Deploying Simpana further promotes this strategy because the software integrates well with the company’s Windows environment. “I often have discussions with people who try to tell me the benefits of Linux-based systems,”

says El-Tahche.” However, if I walk into an organization and implement Windows Server, Exchange Server, SQL Server, and so on, I know they will work and the project will be a success. It’s almost no-risk.”

He adds, “CommVault Simpana is so well integrated with Microsoft software, it’s almost like they were designed together.” For example, FSA Group takes advantage of the new solution’s direct support for the Active Directory® service. “There’s a lot of integration between CommVault software, Windows Search functionality, and Active Directory, which makes setting up permissions simple. From a security management perspective, that helps ensure that search results include only listings that employees are allowed to see.”

El-Tahche also appreciates the integration that Simpana components have with each other, which further simplifies IT management. “It’s so much easier now that we work with a single console for data backup, recovery, archiving, and mail compliance. As a result, I don’t have specialists focusing on different solution components but can have many people who understand the whole suite. That’s a blessing when you have a small staff and need overlapping skills so that you can cover for people who leave the company or take time off.”

Supports Compliance Requirements

Because FSA Group helps customers with Australia’s insolvency protection under Part IX of the Bankruptcy Act of 1966, the company is subject to the government’s compliance regulations for data retention. To better support compliance, the new solution makes it easy to search through information sources that have been traditionally difficult to access, including individual messages and documents, older applications, and drives on employee computers.

“Before, a user request like, ‘Can you help me find this deleted e-mail?’ might require hours, even days. With Simpana and its FAST-based searching, that question is no harder than, ‘Can you look up a phone number?’”

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Specifically, FSA Group uses Simpana to search the company’s Exchange Server 5.5 archives and export them either to Exchange Server 2003 or to programs in Office Professional Edition 2003. This feature is called “Release Independence” because the solution isn’t tied to any particular release of the Microsoft software. Simpana can also import and search the Personal Storage Table (PST) files that are stored on employee computers by applications such as the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003 messaging and collaboration client. “There are times when a customer or government official may ask what we’ve done or how we’ve done it, and the ability to look back through all relevant records is critical,” says El-Tahche. “In the past that could be difficult. With Simpana, we are 100 percent confident we can retrieve the information associated with almost any business or customer transaction.”

Speeds Data Retrieval, Boosts Productivity

Thanks to the new solution’s integration with SQL Server 2005 and advanced FAST indexing engine, FSA Group can rapidly retrieve previously saved records from almost any type of application—e-mail messages, notes, spreadsheets, letters, and so on. And these documents can be retrieved based on any content they might contain. “Before, a user request like, ‘Can you help me find this deleted e-mail?’ might require hours, even days,” says El-Tahche. “With Simpana and its FAST-based searching, that question is no harder than, ‘Can you look up a phone number?’ Not having to worry about these simple requests means our IT staff can spend their time working on larger issues.” FSA Group estimates that the new solution is saving an average of 40 labor hours a month on these user requests.

El-Tahche contrasts the new solution’s fast performance and easy-to-manage operation

with competing technologies that he has previously evaluated. “In the past, we’ve had three or four applications trying to do what Simpana does, and the result just wasn’t as good. For example, I’ve had experience deploying the Google Search Appliance, and while it did index everything, it made managing permissions and protecting sensitive information more difficult. And for what it cost, I could have hired a full-time engineer. I was quite disappointed with it.” El-Tahche says he also didn’t get the level of technical support he needed. “In contrast, CommVault and Microsoft provide the kind of high-quality support that ensures the new solution will be successful in our organization,” he says.

Lowers IT Costs

The new solution is helping FSA Group to save costs in several ways. First, El-Tahche says that one server computer running Windows Server and Simpana offers indexing and search capabilities that are comparable—and often superior—to those of much more expensive search appliances.

Second, the time saved by IT staff in locating archived items and resolving what have become infrequent technical problems has a cost equivalent of about AU\$48,000 (U.S.\$33,154) per year.

Third, FSA Group can now manage its storage resources more efficiently. The solution’s single-instance storage feature (also called de-duplication) stores only one copy of a file during a system backup, even if that file appears in several places. This is very helpful in backing up an e-mail server, for example, because employees frequently forward documents to each other, resulting in many people having copies of the same document. Without single-instance storage, FSA Group estimates that it would need to double its storage capacity to cope with the growth in data.

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Offers Virtually 100 Percent Reliability, High Scalability

Now that it has upgraded its IT environment and deployed the new data management solution, FSA Group no longer experiences routine system failures. “We used to call it the Sunday night blues because we didn’t know what problems we’d run into on Monday morning,” says El-Tahche. “After standardizing on core Microsoft IT software, including Windows Server, and deploying CommVault Simpana, we’re running at 99.999 percent uptime. We didn’t achieve this with anything fancy—we’re just using existing, established technologies to get virtually 100 percent reliability.”

El-Tahche is also confident that this reliability will continue even as the company grows. “When we invested in our Windows Server-based infrastructure, being able to support both organic business growth and growth through acquisition was a big factor in our decision,” he says. “I have full confidence that the IT department can support more than 200 percent business growth without incurring any major IT issues.”

Provides a Foundation for Future Upgrades

With the new solution successfully implemented, FSA Group is now ready to expand it. The company is currently testing and will soon deploy Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 to provide internal Web sites and to further promote document sharing and employee collaboration. “After Office SharePoint Server 2007 is deployed across the organization, we will take advantage of the integrated FAST search capabilities in Simpana to locate SharePoint documents as easily as we locate Exchange Server messages and other documents today.”

The company is also looking into upgrading its Microsoft infrastructure software and

expects that Simpana will make the process easier. El-Tahche says, “With features like Release Independence, Simpana simplifies some of the technical issues that we will face when we upgrade to Windows Server 2008 R2, Microsoft Exchange Server 2007, and Microsoft SQL Server 2008. Beyond that, Simpana will help us to accelerate other future upgrades because we know we’ll be able to search for and recall or restore any data from a previous deployment of Exchange Server, Office SharePoint Server, or Windows Server.”

El-Tahche concludes, “The new solution just works. Employees come in each day, and the systems they depend on work the way they’re supposed to. For us, that’s the most important thing.”

For More Information

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For more information about CommVault products and services, call (732) 870-4000 or visit the Web site at: www.commvault.com

For more information about FSA Group products and services, call (61) (7) 3212 6299 (Australia) or visit the Web site at: www.fsagroup.com.au

Microsoft Server Product Portfolio

For more information about the Microsoft server product portfolio, go to: www.microsoft.com/servers/default.aspx

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Windows Server 2003 Enterprise Edition
 - Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 Enterprise Edition
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2005 Enterprise Edition
- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003
- Windows XP Professional
- CommVault Simpana
- FAST ESP

Hardware

- IBM BladeCenter blade servers
- IBM N Series (NetApp) network-attached storage system

Partner

- CommVault