

Starz Encore Turns to CommVault Data Archiver for Fast Retrieval of Critical Emails

QUICK FACTS

Industry/Solution:

- Entertainment

Platform/File System:

- Windows, Linux, HP/UX

Applications:

- Microsoft Exchange Archiving

Partner Hardware:

- HP Servers

Challenges:

- Reduce time required for email recoveries
- Improve success rate for email recoveries
- Reduce administrative burden on IT

Competitive Challengers:

- Veritas Backup Exec
- IBM Tivoli Storage Manager

Solution:

- CommVault Data Archiver

Benefits:

- Dramatic reduction in time required for recovery of emails; "near real time" recovery
- Creation of easily searchable email archives; ability to search on virtually any criteria
- Ability to recover any email message, including deleted messages

Customer Profile

With offerings including the popular Starz and Encore channels available on cable, satellite, and broadband, the Starz Entertainment Group LLC (SEG) is the largest provider of premium movie services in the United States with approximately 167 million pay units. SEG offerings include digital movie channels with more than 750 movies per month, on-demand pay TV subscription service available on cable, satellite, and broadband platforms, and a suite of advanced High Definition (HD) video offerings. Starz Entertainment Group is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Liberty Media Corporation.

Information Systems Environment

The Starz Encore Information Technology Department is located at SEG headquarters in Englewood, Colorado, and is responsible for all of the company's internal and customer-facing IT operations. Applications run on over 100 various server platforms. For Starz, like many organizations, Microsoft Exchange email is one of their most critical applications. Exchange runs on two email servers in Englewood, and supports approximately 850 mailboxes. When the Starz IT team saw the need to dramatically improve their email retrieval capability, they found the right solution in CommVault's Data Archiver software.

Complex Business Environment

Starz' business is complex and multi-layered. Explains Victor Perez, Vice President of Information Technology, "We work with many major Hollywood production studios. The deals we have with the studios are complex, involving title selection, licensing rights, number of placements, and many other rights issues. That's the supplier side. On the distributor side, we work with the top programming service providers, on all viable platforms (cable, satellite, telecomm). Each relationship is based on a detailed contract.

"Because our contractual arrangements are so numerous and complex, we need to be very clear in our communications. It's an information age, and a deal can depend on one piece of information, one word in a contract. In the past, it was often accepted that you would not be able to get a piece of information. That has changed. Today, the IT world is 'on demand.' It's no longer tolerable to say, 'we can't retrieve that information right now.' There is a competitive advantage of being able to retrieve any information you need, when you need it. When a legal question comes up, it is critical that we have the ability to track email communications between Starz and its business partners."

Demanding Regulatory Environment

"We are also in a more demanding regulatory environment today," says Perez. "For example, the Sarbanes Oxley Act imposes rigorous expectations on the IT group. Between tighter regulatory standards and the emergence of email as a critical communications medium for business, people need to be able to retrieve email documents. If it's in writing - and it's clear now that emails are the same as other written documents - then we need to be able to get back to it. As an IT organization, we need to be able to provide the tracking capability. It used to be tolerable if it took a few days or even weeks to retrieve information. Now, the expectation is that information can be retrieved in real time. It used to be OK to have the information in boxes in the basement or in a tape vault somewhere. Now it's our responsibility as an IT organization to make that information available immediately."

Time-Consuming Process

Until recently, however, when the Starz IT department was asked to help retrieve emails, they ran into a problem. Starz was using a combination of traditional solutions to make nightly full backups of its Exchange servers. The two-step process was adequate

for backup, but proved to be a problem when it came to retrieving email. To retrieve specific messages, it was necessary to find backup tape for the day in question, restore the backup to an offline server, and then search for specific messages. The restore itself could take hours, and the search hours more. If it turned out that the search had not found the needed messages, or if the trail led to other messages on other days, the whole process had to be done all over again. It was incredibly time-consuming.

In the words of Jason Bebensee, Windows System Administrator, "If we had to do a search, it took a very long time, and it didn't work very well. Our success rate was not good. Cataloging the emails could take us weeks, and then we still had to search through them. To get information for only a couple of days' worth of emails could take us a month or two. That's with somebody working on it half time or maybe even full time. The people making the request often would not get what they wanted, and it was very frustrating for IT." While requests were infrequent, when they did come in, IT found itself spending up to 30 hours a week trying to fill the request. At that point, they decided it was time to look for a better solution.

A Better Solution: CommVault Data Archiver

Starz now uses Data Archiver for Exchange to archive all their email, making retrieval dramatically faster and easier. The key concept is that archiving is very different from backup. A backup of MS Exchange simply captures what all the mailboxes look like at the end of the day. But if someone gets an email during the day and then deletes it before the backup is done, it's gone forever. In contrast, Data Archiver for Exchange goes into the journaling option of Exchange each night and uses it to transform the data into searchable information. Data Archiver preserves all the messages, including ones that were deleted. With its extensive content indexing and search capabilities, Data Archiver makes it possible to search on all sorts of criteria (key words, subject, recipient, etc.). The search pulls back the original email, even if it had been deleted. And there is no way to circumvent the system.

"Data Archiver is much better than what we were doing before," says Bebensee. "With Data Archiver, we can go in, input our search parameters. Data Archiver brings the emails up and restores them. We had to do a legal discovery recently. In two days, we were able to retrieve far more information than we could in the past in two months. The software is very easy to use, so our users can do it themselves if they want."

Victor Perez sees that Data Archiver is helping IT respond effectively to the needs of users. "The software is very conducive

to providing almost real-time retrieval of information," he says. "As a result, the administrative effort has diminished dramatically. At the same time, the credibility of the IT group has been enhanced, because we have the right tools to do the job. Our IT guys are walking around with their chests out a little more."

Data Archiver was installed in August 2004. "For the initial installation, I had someone in from Lewan & Associates, our systems supplier," recalls Bebensee. "But once it was set up, now I understand how it works. We are about to upgrade to Exchange 2003, and I will handle the software upgrade myself. Getting going, we had a problem indexing PDFs. We worked with the developer at CommVault, and he wrote a patch. Since then, it's been running perfectly. I haven't gone into it. I don't have to think about it. It runs, and I know it's doing what it's supposed to."

Future Plans: More CommVault in the Starz

"As a supplier, CommVault has been very responsive," says Perez. "They listen, they are consultative. They look at the question from our perspective. It's not, 'here's a solution, hope it works for you.' There's a very good fit with Lewan & Associates, and I know our IT people are happy. Data Archiver has been so effective, we are looking to use it across the organization. We are also investigating using CommVault Galaxy as our Exchange backup solution, in addition to the Data Archiver archiving solution. By simplifying the retrieval problem, Data Archiver has helped give our guys some 'quality of life.' That's important."

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