

XIOtech MAGNITUDE and CommVault Galaxy Help Keep VisionAIR Up and Running for the Nation's Police, Fire, and 911 Agencies

QUICK FACTS

Industry/Solution:

- Healthcare

Platform/File System:

- Windows NT/2000

Application:

- Backup, restore MS Exchange servers, SharePoint Portal servers

Partner Hardware:

- HP/Compaq
- XIOtech MAGNITUDE

Challenges:

- Reliable backups
- Fast restores

Solution:

- CommVault Galaxy Backup & Recovery

Benefits:

- Reliable Backups
- Reduced administrative costs
- Fast restores, including single-message e-mail restores

Customer Profile

For most of us, getting the data we need from our information systems is important, but hardly a matter of life and death. Not so for the nation's firefighters, police workers, and 911 call center personnel!

To help protect all of us, public safety personnel look to their computer systems for the most reliable, accurate, and accessible data possible. To help fulfill their mission, public safety agencies across the country look to VisionAIR, Inc. of Castle Hayne, North Carolina, as the leader in open and integrated IT solutions for all aspects of public safety management. And, to help meet their customers' most critical requirements, VisionAIR looks to the MAGNITUDE™ storage area network (SAN) hardware platform from XIOtech Corporation as their storage system of choice—not only for their own internal use, but also as an integral component of the solution they recommend to their customers.

MAGNITUDE Delivers Maximum Value

"We became interested in the XIOtech solution when one of our customers asked if we supported the MAGNITUDE," explains Charlie Council, network operations manager for VisionAIR. "At the same time, we were looking at storage area networks as an architecture that could offer our customers real benefits."

VisionAIR's customers include public safety agencies from across the U.S. They have to pay close attention to their publicly-funded budgets in purchasing IT solutions. Their purchase usually has to provide effective technology solutions for six to seven years—a difficult challenge in a technology industry accustomed to new product generations every two to three years.

"When we suggest an overall solution to a customer," says Council, "we include hardware as well as software. We work to configure the solution for maximum expandability and cost-effectiveness in order to give the

agencies as long a useful life as possible for their tight budgets. We felt that the MAGNITUDE platform and the SAN architecture might be a good potential solution for our customers."

The MAGNITUDE is a highly flexible platform designed to incorporate all the components of a SAN in one centralized, easy-to-manage, highly-available configuration. With redundant, hot-swappable components, a cluster-ready architecture that provides many-to-many failover capability, nearly unlimited scalability, and a maximum RAID 0 capacity of 11,520GB, the MAGNITUDE has the capacity to handle almost any size storage need. And, since the MAGNITUDE concurrently supports point-to-point, fibre channel-arbitrated loop, and switched fabric topologies, it can be connected to even the most diverse enterprise environments.

Early in 2001, Council's team accepted delivery of a MAGNITUDE for testing with VisionAIR's Public Safety Suite of products. "We also had another SAN from a major system manufacturer signed up for testing," says Council, "but they could never get it working properly. With the MAGNITUDE we set it up, loaded the software, and got down to work."

What began as a simple matter of testing, soon developed into a new core technology for VisionAIR, and a new capability to offer their customers. "We liked the MAGNITUDE enough to use it at our own Customer Support Center," says Council, "and to spec it to our customers."

Simplified Storage Management

Key to VisionAIR's enthusiasm for the MAGNITUDE, is the centralized storage management architecture. "Before the MAGNITUDE we had to configure each server's storage separately," says Council. That was a time-consuming task, and a management headache. "Each server had

its own drive set-up, memory, and driver configuration that had to be installed and managed," says Council. "But not anymore," he adds.

Today, VisionAIR uses the MAGNITUDE as their Customer Support storage platform. The MAGNITUDE stores data for each of the states that VisionAIR supports, plus the company's email, intranet, and Web applications. Sixty-seven support technicians, software quality assurance, and operations people work directly with the MAGNITUDE. But eventually, just about everyone connected with VisionAIR touches data stored on the MAGNITUDE. That totals 180 internal employees and 600 plus customers accessing the Support Center via the Web.

Fifteen Compaq ML 370 and ML 380 servers running Microsoft Windows NT 4.0 boot directly from the MAGNITUDE and run Microsoft SQL server to provide the Customer Support personnel with direct access to centrally stored customer data. They are connected to the MAGNITUDE through a Gadzoox switch and QLogic fibre channel cards. VisionAIR's environment also includes four HP servers running Windows NT and 2000, connected directly to the MAGNITUDE. Two of these servers are clustered and run Microsoft Exchange server for email. A third server runs Microsoft SharePoint Portal Server for the company's intranet and Web presence, including a customer support website. The fourth server manages VisionAIR's backup.

"One of the greatest benefits for us is that with the MAGNITUDE we don't have to worry about storage," says Council. "Now storage can be maintained in one central area, without having to manage it on all the different servers. If we lose a server, we don't lose the data."

This simplified storage management ripples many benefits out to the VisionAIR organization. "Because storage is centralized on the MAGNITUDE," explains Council, "we can focus on building power into our servers. Plus the ease of use of the MAGNITUDE reduces our man-hours. Configuring a server and getting it up and running now takes about 20 minutes because we don't have to worry about balancing the storage."

The MAGNITUDE also has contributed key productivity gains to VisionAIR's support of their customers. Each of VisionAIR's customers has a different set of rules for managing their records, usually set by a state authority. These data sets, explains Kerry Wicks, director of support services for VisionAIR, can be quite large and difficult to handle.

"We get customer data sets of between 10 and 20GB in size," says Wicks. "At any one time we may be working with six to eight of these data sets. Processing that amount of data, and keeping it all separate and private, is very challenging using a conventional distributed server architecture—but not with the MAGNITUDE." The centralized processing and speed of the MAGNITUDE has provided significant performance enhancements. "The MAGNITUDE gives us the ability to install all the different customer data and distribute it efficiently to our different clients within the company. We couldn't do that on normal distributed servers."

Rock-Solid Backup is a Bonus

The system's ease of use is helping VisionAIR accomplish a critical component of their IT strategy: data backup. "Before adopting the MAGNITUDE, we didn't have a backup solution for our clustered servers that we were happy with," says Council. "XIOtech recommended the CommVault Galaxy backup software."

CommVault Galaxy is a high-performance, enterprise-class data protection and backup solution that is ideal for a heterogeneous clustered server environment, like that at VisionAIR. The browser-based interface allows speedy, granular backup and recovery of systems and databases on multiple operating systems and across different applications. VisionAIR backs up their databases and email using the CommVault Galaxy solution.

VisionAIR is happy with the centralized interface that Galaxy provides. "Everything is managed from one console, so it is easy to use and very flexible," says Council. "We can restore an email message down to the piece level without users even knowing it."

Good Enough for VisionAIR's Customers!

Because of the benefits they received from the MAGNITUDE, VisionAIR has become a partner in reselling the MAGNITUDE to their customers. "The centralized storage management feature is a key benefit. It allows us to focus on building the right servers for our customers, and it gives them easy expandability and manageability as their storage needs grow," says Council.

"Having the MAGNITUDE working for us in a production environment is critical," explains Wicks. "As a software company, the hardware platform we choose is important to customers. We use the MAGNITUDE as a demonstration system for our customers."

Training and support was a vital component of VisionAIR's decision to offer the MAGNITUDE as part of the solution they provide. "We are the first line of support for our customers for both hardware and software," explains Council. "If a customer has a question about the MAGNITUDE, they call us for the answer."

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