

Xentrall

Xentrall is a ground-breaking public sector partnership, established in 2008, between neighbouring unitary authorities Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Darlington Borough Council.

Xentrall works jointly with both councils supporting them in the delivery of their ICT, Design and Print services, transactional HR and transactional Finance.

The ICT estate includes between 450 servers and covers all council services from social care and education to technical services (housing and highways) and the administrative services, which keep the council running, a total of over 200 different businesses each with their own applications.

As well as dealing with a vast amount of disparate data from these different businesses, Xentrall has to take strict data regulations into consideration, in particular for all the sensitive and personal data it holds. Child Care Services data for example has a particularly high level of protection and the retention period is 70 years. In addition, Xentrall needs to comply with further regulations to meet PCI, PSN and ISO certifications as well meeting standards set by external auditors. For Xentrall, it is imperative that it can demonstrate the integrity of its data sets.

Challenge

In 2008, when it first consolidated the two councils, Xentrall had 600 servers across the two data centres, as well as 40 servers across different locations. These servers were backed up daily, but the backups were physical and difficult to manage. Like many organisations, Data Recovery (DR) was still tape-based at this time and dedicated computer operators were responsible for changing the tapes, moving them offsite and bringing them back when a recovery was required. This laboured process meant a recovery could take over a day to complete if the tape was requested later in the day, and occasionally the wrong tape was delivered, which created delays to the process and to the time it took to get the affected system backup and running.

Before Xentrall first deployed Commvault in 2010, application backups were managed by the system administrator responsible. Xentrall was aware that the aggregate time spent on backups by system administrators represented a significant waste of human resources, and distracted them from supporting their applications.

In 2010, as part of its goal to create a more cost efficient organisation and deliver service improvements, Xentrall sought a data management company that could help consolidate the two councils' data into a single datacentre, combine both networks and move to a more virtual environment.

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Solution

Xentrall looked at various solutions but could not find one that enabled it to achieve all the solutions it wanted in one single system until it evaluated Commvault. Back in 2010, the goal was to modernise both backup and DR by moving from tape to disk. Once this was achieved and the Commvault solution was in place Xentrall had a far more effective DR strategy and could advance its IT service further. Taking advantage of the breadth of features on the Commvault platform Xentrall moved from backup modernisation to making efficiencies such as implementing new archiving features that would deliver considerable capital savings.

Commvault software performs backups across Xentrall's varied environment comprising: Oracle, Microsoft SQL Server, MySQL, Progress and Sybase, ensuring Xentrall has compatibility with whichever databases are being used by each of the various departments, from both councils. The Commvault platform also gives Xentrall a simple way to create and shut down virtual machines (VM) as it moves towards its goal of a more virtual environment. Deploying Commvault, not only gave Xentrall the platform it needed to backup to disk simply and efficiently, but it opened up a wealth of further opportunities for continued improvements to its data management. So, a few years after the initial deployment, Xentrall looked to Commvault again to assist it; this time archive was in the spotlight.

Most recently, Xentrall has implemented an entirely new virtual platform on Commvault's next generation software. The project scope was across storage, servers, backup target and Commvault media agent servers, including the migration of 400+ servers across to it. Migrating from 6 year old storage and servers to a new Nimble SAN, Commvault software running on Cisco servers, with Nexsan as the backup target, all connected via 10GB iSCSI, and running the latest version of Commvault's data platform.

"No other product offered the breadth of functionality provided by Commvault, and it keeps adding new features. Whatever you're looking for a data management solution to do, the Commvault solution will do it."

Matloob Hussain, ICT Infrastructure Engineer

Benefit

Deploying the email and file archiving solution from Commvault enabled Xentrall to archive 20TB of data, which it could then store on more cost-effective storage. The instant access feature meant that users were unaware that any changes had taken place. Data was still as accessible as it has been before it had been archived so there was no disruption to the business.

Commvault's mailbox archive has special support for Outlook Web Access (OWA). This means users can access archived messages and attachments via Outlook at their own computer or from any PC using webmail; a third option is to use the search tools directly via a browser. Xentrall use all three which is completely seamless to the end user and simple to use.

In addition, deduplication has reduced the overall data from over 200TB to 11TB. So, despite the overall growth in data, which is around 10%, no additional storage has had to be bought. In turn, because archiving also reduces the amount of data storage saved on Xentrall's primary storage, it speeds up DR and backups are completed more quickly. The physical servers are backed up daily and there are nightly virtual backups of the entire estate. Xentrall has over 100 systems that require application-aware backup as sometimes there are requests to backup at the weekend as well. Commvault allows all these different functions to be managed from a single pane, streamlining the process and enabling staff to spend their time more productively.

Xentrall migrated to the latest release of Commvault software for their entire virtual infrastructure with zero downtime, and are now planning to install Commvault snapshot management technology in conjunction with their Nimble SAN to protect critical SQL instances and some unstructured data.

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