



Storage Networking Solutions (SNS) UK

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Dixons group PLC relies on GlassHouse for backup

Date: Friday 1 of June 2007

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“ Dixons is a leading European specialist retailer of consumer electronics, with operations in thirteen countries. GlassHouse was first introduced to Dixons over two and a half years ago, when the storage solutions provider conducted a Backup Assessment and advised on a contingency that would enable Dixons to continue using its existing backup infrastructure for a further 12 months. At this point, the infrastructure had to be updated, due to a rapid growth in data, and in the number of additional servers Dixons was running. Data volumes had increased as a result of the growth of the business (growing at a rate of 60% year to year). ”

Dixons faced a number of challenges as the current backup system reached its full capacity. According to Caroline Vine, IT project manager at Dixons, “The backup was taking a long time to complete and often failing. Crucially, because the backup cycle was running over into business hours. It was also impacting on network performance.”

A vast amount of IT resources were being used to administer the backup process, which had become a full time job for one of the IT team members. Plus, due to the growth in data volumes, a data restore could take up to 20 hours.

In addition, Dixons' two backup sites in England — Hemel Hempstead and Stevenage — were both running off different backup software versions that were incompatible. This meant that within the existing infrastructure it was not possible to restore data from one site to another. This was one of the main issues to overcome in order to centralize the backup infrastructure and simplify management.

Backup management was further impacted by the fact that Dixons had no formal policy in place for document management and archiving, which has led to multiple versions of the same documents being stored – increasing storage volumes unnecessarily.

Working with GlassHouse, Dixons realized the need for a new backup infrastructure in order to ensure effective and secure backup of its highly valuable data. Easy and cost-efficient management of the new infrastructure was also a critical factor.

The Solution - How GlassHouse Helped

“A common system based on a standardized infrastructure and tape library was designed and implemented across both sites,” said Caroline Vine, Dixons. “This meant that backup tapes from each site could be restored at either location.” A two-phase approach was undertaken to implement the solution. Phase one, focused on the Stevenage site, where Dixons' difficulties stemmed primarily from a growth in the volume of the data being stored and the fact that the system had not been upgraded for some time. In addition, the use of 'standalone' tape devices, with no method for automatically loading and unloading backup tapes, was very manually intensive.

Phase two, focused on the Hemel Hempstead site and the set up of a new storage library. This required new hardware in order to meet the requirements of the business by ensuring both sites reflected each other. “Phase one was the easiest to implement and delivered the biggest improvement,” said Tony Walsh, account manager at GlassHouse.

“The Hemel Hempstead modifications were more challenging and involved a lot of careful preparation in order to complete an overnight switch from the old infrastructure to the new one.”

The technology used for both phases was StorageTek L700e libraries and Legato NetWorker backup software along with replacement HP Backup servers. The whole solution was designed to cope with at least three years of predicted growth and to dovetail into any future storage consolidation projects.

Working in Partnership

Based on the extensive expertise and experience of its consultants, GlassHouse simplified implementation of the new backup infrastructure in order to minimize disruption for Dixons. “The GlassHouse team's independent viewpoint and

knowledge of the storage marketplace gave us confidence that the new infrastructure was based on the most suitable technologies and that it would work," said Richard Powell, Dixons.

"Not only was the GlassHouse team extremely well organized and knowledgeable, but also possessed the crucial ability to communicate the business benefits of the technology solution being put in place," said Caroline Vine, Dixons. "The expertise of the onsite technical consultant was second to none, based on extensive knowledge of an extremely wide range of storage technologies. This undoubtedly contributed to the efficiency and the speed with which the project was completed."

In addition, GlassHouse minimized unknowns by communicating any problems or potential issues to the team at Dixons at the earliest stage, clearly identifying a recommended course of action. "This really gave me confidence that the project would be delivered within the agreed timeframes and elevated GlassHouse to the position of a key services provider to Dixons," said Caroline Vine.

Supporting Dixons

Although the smooth running of the new system has reduced support requirements, Dixons is also provided with ongoing telephone support from GlassHouse for the entire backup environment. During the planning phase, Dixons and GlassHouse agreed to aim for a 25% improvement in backup performance. "The new backup infrastructure far exceeded its target, reducing some backup times by over 75%," said Richard Powell, Dixons. "This means that the full backup process, which took five days on the old system, can now be completed within 36 hours. In addition, the administration time required to manage the backup was cut in half, freeing up IT resources to focus on more strategic projects."

The new system has also greatly improved Dixons ability to restore business critical information in the event of data loss. "These improvements demonstrate that the new backup infrastructure delivered by GlassHouse has provided an efficient and reliable solution - one that is scalable enough to continue to meet the organization's needs for the next three to five years," concludes Richard Powell, Dixons.

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