



Dickinson Wright Witnesses Vast Improvements with EqualLogic SAN

Company:

Law firm delivering comprehensive services to clients of all sizes

Industry:

Legal Services

Platform:

Microsoft® Windows® Server 2003, Windows XP desktop operating system, Extreme Networks® switches, Overland Storage® REO Series data backup and recovery appliances

Applications:

IBM® Lotus Notes®, Hummingbird® DM® 5

Challenges:

Distributed operations complicated by applications and data tied to direct attached storage, called for superior performance, continuous availability, and easy scaling

Solution:

iSCSI SAN supports blade server infrastructure with key functions such as snapshot-based backup, scaling with automatic configuration, and replication for disaster recovery

Dickinson Wright PLLC has a long history of success – founded in 1878, the law firm has been serving clients for more than a century. From offices in Michigan (Detroit, Bloomfield Hills, Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Ann Arbor) and Washington D.C., Dickinson Wright's 450+ employees deliver comprehensive legal services to organizations of all sizes – from individuals and new ventures to small and large companies to government units. It takes vision and execution to succeed over the long haul – and it takes the same kind of vision and execution in today's IT environment to support the firm's objectives of client success, civic and charitable responsibility, and employee achievement.

Operations Manager Alan Hunt has that vision. Responsible for managing multiple locations with a small staff, he needed a flexible, easy-to-manage infrastructure. While the company had gotten along well enough with Microsoft Windows servers, Windows XP desktop operating system clients, and direct attached storage, he knew that the firm would benefit from separating the servers from their operating environment – easing management, growth, and business continuity. "We can't be tied to the physical box any more," Hunt says. "If a server fails in one location, I want to be able to bring up a spare server and boot it as if it were the original." In 2002 he launched a project to replace five-year old servers and storage with IBM blade servers and a storage area network (SAN).

Since e-mail and legal documents are the lifeblood of the firm, Dickinson Wright's mission critical applications are IBM Lotus Notes and Hummingbird DM 5 document management software. Previously, each location had servers, direct attached storage, and onsite backup tape drives and libraries. But with attorneys and staff members working long hours, continual application and data availability are critical. "Today, users are not accepting any downtime – whether it's their Blackberry® handheld, notebook, or cable modem from home, they need access all the time." Hunt decided to build a highly available infrastructure in which individual servers would not be impacted by backups. He wanted not only availability, but quality 98% uptime by backing up from snapshots, as well as high performance, continuous availability, quick and easy scaling, and disaster recovery.

EqualLogic Functionality Judged Better than IBM

Hunt began looking at Fibre Channel solutions from established vendors. "Talk about sticker shock," he recalls. "Before I would think of requesting budget dollars, I have to be able to justify it in my own mind, and \$300,000 for 1 terabyte just didn't make sense."

Hunt knew of iSCSI and felt that it could be the right solution. He looked at other iSCSI solutions but didn't like their limited functionality and licensing costs. Hunt comments, "I like EqualLogic's strategy of what you pay for gets you everything inside the array – all the functionality at no extra cost." But it was EqualLogic's data striping and automatic load balancing that really impressed him. "When you plug in an EqualLogic array, you get 3 GigE ports and your volumes stripe across all 12 active drives. Plug in another array – and now you are working across 24 spindles and 6 GigE ports – that's music to my ears! Why doesn't everyone do that?"

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*- Dickinson Wright's Operations Manager,
Alan Hunt*

Another key factor in his decision was what Hunt calls "three-dimensional modularity." "To be able to add an array and walk away, knowing the new one would take on the properties of the others – that's incredible. Now I can grow on demand without the headache of redesigning architectures." Hunt considers scalability a major strength of the PS Series array. Other features that impressed him were multi-path input/output (MPIO) capability and the integration with Microsoft's Volume Shadow Copy Service (VSS) that vastly simplifies backing up from snapshots.

Ultimately, Hunt's decision was simple. "EqualLogic's features are so advanced and still so easy to manage," he says. "And, I decided that in a year I'd be mostly done – not still waiting to begin."

Evidence of Success

When the project is complete later this year, Dickinson Wright will have 140 servers (mostly blades) and 11 PS200E arrays with 61 terabytes of capacity. REO Series secondary storage appliances from Overland Storage will be added for disk-to-disk-to-tape backups, a process Hunt has been using for some time to keep applications online and data quickly available.

Even before the project is complete, Hunt is enjoying the results. Adding capacity is simple now – no longer does it require a trip to the site, hauling servers and parts. While Hunt waits for installation of the REO appliances, he is backing up directly to the PS200E arrays. "My incremental backup of 15 servers took 10 minutes instead of several hours," he says. "And a full backup of 600 gigabytes took an hour and 20 minutes." Also, Hunt can run 20 backups at a time – twice what he expected.

Hunt will be adding PS Series arrays in all locations, and plans to replicate data from remote site Detroit to the datacenter in Bloomfield Hills for disaster recovery. "Not only does the EqualLogic solution enable our disaster recovery, but I don't have to go back every year to ask for more money," Hunt says. "With other solutions, you pay for every little piece of functionality. EqualLogic has a much better way, delivering all the performance, reliability, and functionality I could want right from the start." In addition, he plans to use SAN booting capabilities to make blade server deployment even easier.

Simplifying Networked Storage

EqualLogic PS Series solutions deliver the benefits of storage consolidation in an intelligent, enterprise-class storage system that is easy to install, manage and grow. Visit our web site at www.equallogic.com and let us show you what *simplifying networked storage* can mean for your business.



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