

College of the North Atlantic

customer profile

Customer

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Industry

Education

Challenges

- Data volumes at some remote sites had grown to a point where they couldn't be backed up in a single night.
- Existing disk-based systems had nearly reached capacity and were being phased out.

Key solutions

Six-node EMC Avamar grid

Benefits

- Reducing duplicate data with Avamar cut backup times significantly – backups that used to take hours now complete in minutes.
- Capacity on the new Avamar grid is only 18% - much lower than anticipated.
- IT staff can now restore data much more efficiently by selecting individual files, rather than having to deal with virtual disks or tape sets.



College cuts network congestion with EMC Avamar deduplication solution from Open Storage Solutions

Challenges

Offering nearly 100 full-time and more than 300 part-time courses to 20,000 students a year, College of the North Atlantic (CNA) is one of the largest post-secondary educational and skills training centres in Canada.

With a history going back more than 40 years, the school operates 17 campuses throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and one in the Middle East State of Qatar. The college has seven schools offering programs in the areas of applied arts, business studies, health sciences, engineering, industrial trades, information technology and tourism and natural resources.

CNA has to back up a mountain of data every night from its campuses across the province over its wide area network (WAN) to its central site in St. John's, NL. Initially, CNA purchased a disk-based system to handle the task. While the system worked well for a brief period, CNA quickly ran into trouble.

"We were fixing problems daily and were running out of time on our backup windows," says Peter Gullage, Systems Analyst with CNA. "The data volumes at some of our sites got so large we couldn't back them up in a single night."

To make matters worse, CNA's disk-based storage systems were being phased out by their vendor with no upgrade path available.

EMC Avamar

With its backup times and volumes soaring out of control, CNA decided a new solution was required and called in its data storage partner Open Storage Solutions. In business since 1979, Open Storage Solutions has 11 sales and service offices across North America, offering a wide range of product solutions built around leading storage technologies.

Open Storage suggested a platform built around EMC Avamar de-duplication technology.

"By removing duplicate data, the college would be able to lower its backup times significantly," says Frank Power, Account Manager with Open Storage Solutions. "They would also be able to extend the life of their disk systems, which wouldn't have to store as much data."

EMC Avamar deduplicates redundant data at the source (client), delivering fast, daily backups by minimizing the amount of data that needs to be sent over the network to a central site. Avamar also deduplicates backups globally across sites and servers for cost-effective retention on disk. Single step recovery eliminates the hassle of restoring full and subsequent incremental backups, while daily Avamar server and data recoverability checks provide peace of mind.

“De-duplication was new to us,” Gullage says. We looked at some other solutions that would have done de-duplication at the central site, but that meant we would still have to back-haul all the duplicate data across our WAN and we wouldn’t be able to reduce our backup windows. Avamar was a much better fit for us, because it got rid of any duplicate data at the local sites.”

“The amount of digital data generated within organizations is growing exponentially,” says Michael Kerr, Director of Channels for EMC Canada. “With its ability to globally de-duplicate data at the source, EMC Avamar helps companies control their expanding data volumes.”

“After the initial load, the amount of new data went down to about .05%. Our backups, which had been running for hours in some cases, were now running anywhere from 15 seconds to 20 minutes.”

Peter Gullage, Systems Analyst, College of the North Atlantic

Results

CNA purchased a six-node Avamar grid and installed the solution with help from Open Storage and EMC. Working with Open Storage and EMC was an enjoyable experience, Gullage notes.

“Open Storage did a great job of listening to our needs and then recommending a solution that fit perfectly,” he explains. “EMC was good to deal with because they kept bringing the same people back to speak with us, so we didn’t need to bring them up-to-speed every time. With some other vendors you get a different representative in every meeting and you have to start from square one.”

Open Storage and EMC staff spent a week at the college helping set up and configure the Avamar solution. In its first backup, the college got duplicate data of about 75%, meaning for every 100 gigabytes (GB) of data backed up, only 25 GB was actually copied onto CNA’s disks.

“After the initial load, the amount of new data went way down to about .05%,” Gullage says. “Our backups, which had been running for hours in some cases, were now running anywhere from 15 seconds to 20 minutes.”

CNA is also able to restore its data more easily now with Avamar in place.

“In the past our staff would have to deal with tape sets or virtual disks,” Gullage explains. “Now they don’t need to worry about that at all. They can just pick the files they want and do the restores.”

After three months the Avamar grid was at 18% of capacity, even better than CNA and Open Storage had hoped.

In the future, CNA hopes to add another Avamar grid to its disaster recovery site in Corner Brook, NL to ease backups at that site as well.

“Avamar is one of the few enterprise-class products we’ve bought in the last few years that has worked exactly as expected,” Gullage says. “We’ve improved our backup times, reduced our backup volumes and simplified our restore procedures. It’s made life a lot easier for our staff.”

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