

Disk to disk to tape is 80% quicker

Critical data back-up times reduced by 80%, enhanced data protection, much faster disaster recovery times and better business continuity protection are key benefits reported by electronic and industrial products distributor Premier Farnell since implementing new disk-to-disk-to-tape technology.

The company had been running short of storage on its 200-plus servers, but also needed to cut disaster recovery times so that it could restore critical data systems within four hours.

Premier Farnell looked to its existing storage supplier StorageTek for a solution, and implemented a

StorageTek L700e tape library to handle its data expansion, along with a BladeStore B220 disk array for disk-to-disk-to-tape backup and restore.

Disk-to-disk-to-tape technology was selected to deal with the performance problems associated with back-up and restore of large numbers of servers over IP networks. Data from multiple servers is backed up in parallel to disk and then transferred en masse to tape over the SAN (storage area network).

Tape interleaving – normally required to combine slow IP network streams to store data onto

high speed tape drives, but a principal cause of slow restore times – is thus eliminated. Instead, disk is used to perform restores of small files very quickly, while tape reduces storage costs for point-in-time backup data, and to provide fastest streaming performance during full system restores.

For Premier Farnell, it's working well, and data movement has also been automated using Veritas NetBackup 5. The company says that, with the upgrades and an offsite back-up vault and recovery site, business continuity protection has been significantly improved.

By upgrading its existing IT infrastructure, Premier Farnell is also in a position to support increasing service and application demands. With backup windows reduced by more than 50%, it is now meeting its daily backup service levels, while the storage upgrade has overcome

the earlier limitations.

Anthony Downes, computer operations controller: "Before the upgrade, we were faced with the challenge of the volume of our data growing faster than our storage productivity could manage... The solution has helped Premier Farnell improve storage utilisation by provisioning storage just in time. This allows the company to avoid the costs associated with storage resources that sit idle until they are needed."

It's also worth noting incidentally that the StorageTek BladeStore B220 disk subsystem provides a cost effective disk solution based on serial ATA technology, with the benefits of Fibre Channel SAN connectivity and streaming performance for backup and restore applications.

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Standard IT solves Heather problems

Modern mainstream IT, along with standards-based programming and automation kit plus a collaborative engineering environment, have solved a problem for oilfield development firm Lundin Britain.

The company's decision to operate the Broom oil field as a satellite of the Heather Alpha platform meant that new oil flow computers were required for allocation metering.

Since the new system would be an upgrade to an existing plant from the '70s, space was at a premium, and conventional two-

metre high 19in IT racking was out of the question.

SoftFlow PLC was the solution – developed by industrial systems builder Aquidata Excel with Schneider Electric.

The firm went for high-availability Modicon Quantum PLC hardware from Telemecanique, one of the Schneider brands, because of its open design (Transparent Ready), which uses Ethernet, and the Unity suite, offering graphical collaborative engineering.

Programming was via Java applets developed by Aquidata Excel and used with Schneider's FactoryCast comms library. The user interface is provided by a Transparent Ready web browser on the PLC network module.

The result: Aquidata Excel's SoftFlow PLC delivers functionality for up to 100 streams from a single PLC. Space requirements are hugely reduced, along with costs – while its integral web server means that any PC workstation can operate as a full-function user interface.

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Managing mountains of RFID data

US-based materials supply and construction firm Graniterock, a long-term user of business intelligence software for analytics and reporting, has found that extending it to manage its RFID data is working both internally and for customers.

Graniterock, which totes truckloads of rock, sand and gravel around, had been using Business Objects' software for its balanced scorecard work and statistical process control reporting. It also used the system to help with logistics management and to email quotes and job status reports.

When it implemented RFID tagging for inventory and supply movements tracking it found that its information management needs grew exponentially.

The RFID system collects information on the truck, project and weight for each load via RFID tag readers throughout its plants. Now the company uses its business intelligence system to front all that so that its users – from finance to sales, operational management, maintenance planners and



customers – can gain appropriate insight into performance and status.

"Business Objects is the key to unlocking the power of RFID," insists Steve Snodgrass, CFO of Graniterock. "Without Business Objects, we would collect a lot of data but be able to take little advantage of it."

The system is used, for example, to determine and justify transport charges which, based on hour or load, are a substantial component of costs. Customers get real-time reports on truck pick-ups and deliveries as well as operational reports that show reasons for different timeframes and costs for similar jobs.

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