

Unitrends' Data Protection Units and Data Protection Vaults provide cost-effective backup and recovery for Griffin-Spalding County School System.

BACKGROUND

Griffin-Spalding County School System, south of Atlanta, Georgia is a public school system with 21 K-12 schools and approximately 11,000 students and 850 teachers. The school system's annual operations budget is \$80 million.

The IT department at Griffin-Spalding comprises 14 people, who manage 37 servers based on Microsoft Windows. Until a year ago, the school system relied on a self-described "hodge-podge" of different tape-based backup solutions residing on a small storage area network.

THE CHALLENGES

After Katrina devastated New Orleans, Griffin-Spalding County IT Director Rod Smith realized that his school system's network could have just as easily been destroyed, and its employees left without the data it uses to conduct everyday business. Without the ability to back up student information, the school system would face huge financial repercussions, because money that the system receives from the federal government is based on the availability and contents of that data.

Some schools in the New Orleans area, Smith said, faced enormous difficulties securing funding for months after the storm because so much of their student data was lost and unrecoverable.

Even without the threat of a natural disaster, the Griffin-Spalding school system had struggled with existing backups because they had to rely on often untrained employees to create, manage and rotate backup tapes every week.

"It became apparent that we needed some kind of enterprise backup solution to cover us if we had a catastrophic event like Hurricane Katrina in our city," Smith said. "Having worked in other larger IT shops, I knew that we were a small school

district and could not afford a solution such as I had implemented in other organizations that relied on having redundant hot sites and that sort of thing."

Smith also faced a growing amount of data and servers that needed to be backed up. The district's servers had doubled from 18 to 37 since he had installed the Unitrends' data protection solution. And, it was likely that the amount of business-critical data he needed to protect would grow from its current size of 1.2TB.


"We didn't have the funds to do the same level of backup as a large enterprise corporation," Smith said. "But we had heard some positive things about BareMetal recovery of entire servers, and we realized that Unitrends was a possible fit."

THE SOLUTION

Spalding turned to the Unitrends integrated Rapid Recovery System, incorporating Data Protection Unit (DPU) and Data Protection Vault (DPV) appliances to protect their servers' operating systems, applications and user data both locally and at offsite locations.

"After Katrina, it became obvious that we needed an enterprise backup solution to protect our data. But, like other small to mid-level school districts, we didn't have the financial luxury or resources to purchase or manage a more expensive backup package. With the Unitrends Data Protection Units, we get to back up our data in an enterprise environment and we get to do it in a way that gives us the confidence and assurance that the data is recoverable."

-- Rod Smith, IT Director, Griffin-Spalding County School System



The Unitrends' system features local DPU appliances that connect to the school system's network and provide disk-to-disk (D2D) data backup and disaster recovery, effectively eliminating cumbersome tape-based operations. These on-premise DPUs also facilitate the electronic "vaulting" of local data to a centrally-located DPV for true disaster recovery protection.

The DPUs serve as onsite hot recovery devices, and their removable disk architecture allow Spalding to archive data on removable drives at a nearby safe location as well.

Finally, the Unitrends DPUs provide BareMetal™ snapshots of Spalding's servers, configuration settings and complete operating environment so that entire failed servers can be quickly recovered. These BareMetal recovery capabilities provide sector/track level data protection that avoids the need to format drives, load operating systems and reinstall applications. They can also recover a failed system to new hardware that might not match the original system configuration, which is often times necessary in a true disaster.

BENEFITS

Since the Unitrends solution was implemented in November 2007, Smith said he feels more confident that the school system's data is protected and easily recoverable if needed. Spalding has already conducted several BareMetal™ server recoveries, mostly to address "self-inflicted" problems within the school system's network.

"Basically I wanted to replace a server with a unit that was still being put together," Smith said. "So I found an identical server and upgraded it offline - it had the same memory and storage. Then we did a BareMetal recovery to that server. We've done that at least twice in the span of a couple of weeks. And, it was fun, easy and fast."

With the Unitrends solution, Smith has been able to - on several occasions - upgrade servers with additional storage space and memory without having to take them down for two or three days. One backup was conducted during a server upgrade exercise in which Smith and his team continued to work while the replacement server was still in production.

Most importantly, the Unitrends appliances have allowed Spalding to better protect student information and teaching applications, and has shortened the time window allotted to back up the school system's data.

"At our schools, the most important thing is our students' data and records," said Smith. "If we lost data and our student information system failed, it would cause enormous problems with how we handle grades—and limit our access to federal funds because all that information has to be verified and sent to the federal government."

In addition, Smith noted that the school system has to adhere to federal regulations such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which enforces strict mandates regarding how student records and health information is protected and transported from school to school.

KEY BENEFITS

- > Recovery time reduced to minutes rather than hours
- > Quick BareMetal recovery of entire failed servers
- > Protection for student information systems and business-critical applications
- > Easy to use and manage

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