



“The F5 ARX solution doesn’t only solve current challenges. With its intelligent file management, it will help ensure operability in the future, too.”

Stephan Kraft, Systems Manager, ivv

IT Service Provider ivv Implements F5 Storage Solution for Robust IT Operations

The German-based **Informationsverarbeitung für Versicherungen GmbH (ivv)** is an IT service provider for insurance companies, specializing in running host-based and client-server environments. The company has about 370 staff based out of its offices in Hanover and Oldenburg, and it undertakes work mostly for general insurers.

Due to enormous growth in the volume of data in ivv’s file service environment, the company was facing significant challenges with backing up and restoring data. Instead of investing in a costly storage and backup solution, ivv looked to F5 for an intelligent, long-term solution to manage the growth in data volume and to improve service quality for its roughly 7,500 users.

Business Challenges

At ivv, the amount of data in the file service environment had grown by about 50 percent in recent years. This created challenges in storage capacity and backup time management.

“As a result of the huge growth in data volumes, backups were taking longer and longer,” says Stephan Kraft, Systems Manager at ivv. “If we started a backup at 6:00 p.m., it was still running the next morning when we came back into the office. We had to interrupt it, otherwise it would have affected production systems by slowing down the

other applications.” The problems with the daily backup made it difficult to commit to operational reliability over the long term.

An additional issue was that the hard drives on the file servers were striped. Striping is a way of spreading large volumes of data across several disks. The maximum recommended number of disks—each with a capacity of 8.5 GB—in a stripe set configuration is 48, giving a total hard drive capacity of about 400 GB. At ivv, this limit had already been reached, so the only option was to increase the stripe size. This

Overview

Industry

IT services

Challenges

- Optimization of file services
- Reduction of backup time

Solution

- F5® ARX®4000

Benefits

- Tier 1 backup time reduced to 5 hours
- Time to ROI calculated at 2.5 years
- Downtime-free migrations

Partner

Computacenter



would have involved copying all the data from one place to another—an extremely time consuming process.

For ivv it was clear that data volumes would continue to grow in the future, and that even heavy investment, such as expensive additional Tier 1 storage capacity, would not deliver a permanent solution to the problem. Instead, the company started thinking about a new system to manage the file service environment which, at the same time, would improve service quality.

Solution

To find out more about a permanent, forward-looking solution, staff at ivv contacted their business partner **Computacenter**, Europe's largest multivendor provider of IT infrastructure services, and asked it to suggest possible alternatives. Once the technical details and requirements had been clarified, ivv evaluated several solutions and decided on the F5 ARX platform. Following an obligatory proof of concept, completed jointly by F5 and Computacenter, ARX was implemented and put into operation. The decisive factor behind ivv's choice was that the ARX solution provided file tiering, enabling ivv to sort and structure its data according to policy-driven usage criteria.

During the implementation of the solution, ivv started by creating two storage tiers, each running on native Windows servers. Tier 1 was based on a cluster and Tier 2 was comprised of single systems. Subsequent to this, first the Windows cluster and then the single Windows systems were replaced by network-attached storage (NAS).

"During the test and installation phase, the support from F5 Networks was excellent," says Kraft. All the glitches that arose during installation were resolved quickly. One of

"The data migrations now run without any interruptions, and that's a big relief."

these was the relatively high number of IP addresses ivv required, which were rapidly made available.

Because tiering stores the data in two different places, ivv's support staff initially thought the backup and restore process would be difficult to visualize. However, in most scenarios storage teams do not face this problem because the whole procedure can be run from a single interface. This means users do not need to worry about where data is actually stored. The files are visible in their usual places, even if they are stored in different areas on the back end. After a short training course, the support staff at ivv ran the backup-and-restore procedures exclusively using ARX, and so were able to benefit from more convenient features of the F5 solution.

Benefits

ivv has already achieved two key goals for its implementation of the F5 ARX solution—ensuring enterprise security with optimal file management and easy data migration.

Tier 1 backup time reduced to 5 hours

Once the system was up and running, data that was more than a year old was moved into Tier 2. This reduced the backup time for Tier 1 data to just five hours, because Tier 2 information, which is effectively unused, made up 70 percent of the whole data volume.

Time to ROI calculated at 2.5 years

The Tier 2 files are currently backed up once a month. This has ensured that the most urgent problem was solved, with the restoration of IT operations' reliability. "As we put only Tier 1 data on high-end systems (EMC Symmetrix V-Max), and use midrange systems for Tier 2 (EMC CLARiiON), we've been able to save money on expensive storage space," says Kraft. The overall return on investment has been calculated at two and a half years.

Downtime-free migrations

The migration of Tier 1 data to NAS with EMC Symmetrix and Tier 2 to CLARiiON has eliminated the storage limits of the Windows servers. The available storage capacity is now 6.5 terabytes for Tier 1 and 13.5 terabytes for Tier 2, with all data mirrored to a second set of systems for additional protection. The migration itself was carried out with ARX in two steps.

"The data migrations now run without any interruptions, and that's a big relief," says Kraft. "The ARX solution has the advantage of running in the background, carrying out data migrations automatically, and with no tight deadlines. Once they're done, the migrated drives can be easily taken out of service without any loss of data."

With optimized file service management and the division of data into two tiers, ivv is now equipped for further growth in data volume in the future. The IT team has also come to appreciate the downtime-free migrations for other reasons. "As ARX runs automatically with no problems and no interruptions, we've actually managed to have the odd weekend off," concludes Kraft.

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