

Getronics



Getronics improves services thanks to ILM strategy

Business continuity is essential for an IT services supplier such as Getronics. After all, the company has to be in a position to offer its customers uninterrupted services. So an Information Lifecycle Management strategy (ILM) makes an important contribution to Getronics' business. What is more, its customers are increasingly asking for advice about business continuity.

In 2005 the IT service provider faced the prospect of a big investment in its storage infrastructure. Besides the continual growth in databases (in the first half of 2005 alone Getronics' computer data increased by 70 percent to 900 terabytes), more capacity was also needed due to a number of important mergers and takeovers that resulted in the company growing by 25%. Getronics was also striving for the maximum consolidation of servers and applications through its two redundant data centres, one in the United States (Boston) and one in Europe (Brussels), which serve local offices in around 30 countries. This consolidation and the fact that workers worldwide were going to collaborate more digitally also placed greater demands on the storage infrastructure.

Research conducted by Getronics revealed that a lot of data was saved on unnecessarily expensive media even though 80 percent of the information wasn't even accessed just 90 days later. They had to be able to find a cheaper alternative. So together with EMC, which has been supplying Getronics for many years, they worked out an Information Lifecycle Management strategy. This involves people specifying what sort of data the company has, who uses them and when, and how important these data are for business processes. This way, they could decide which storage systems and policies are most appropriate for specific kinds of data at each moment in their life cycle.

Investment costs recovered in five months

Getronics also based its ILM approach on a number of previously formulated conditions, including ones covering the desired availability, reliability, archiving and recovery time for data. The other conditions were a good tie-up with the business wishes and fast adaptation to shifting

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Getronics is an IT services supplier. The company has some 25,000 staff and is active in more than 30 countries.

Business challenge

Because of the rapid growth of data, also as a result of acquisitions, Getronics faced the prospect of a big investment. Also, unused data were stored on expensive storage systems and a consolidation was inevitable.

EMC Solution

Together with EMC, Getronics developed and implemented an Information Lifecycle Management strategy. For each kind of data they assessed which storage medium was most suitable at which moment.

Business benefits

- **Lower costs** – Thanks to consolidation of the servers and the avoidance of large investments.
- **Business and IT attuned to each other** – Thanks to ILM strategy.
- **Greater flexibility and simpler management** – Because of centralisation the infrastructure is now easier to manage and adjust if needed, for example with new takeovers.
- **Maximum availability** – Due to faster back-up and recovery.
- **Extra business** – Business continuity strengthens image and attracts new projects.

requirements, such as changes in the organisation. Of course, the anticipated cost savings also played an important part.

The different kinds of data stored both internally and externally by Getronics, including databases, files, e-mail and fixed-content storage, were grouped in this way into no more than three storage levels. This showed that, among other things, Getronics no longer needed to invest in extra storage of the most expensive category. So they were able to avoid the purchase of an extra storage system costing some 1.5 million euros. The costs of the ILM project itself were recovered in five months. Besides the economic benefits, people also noticed an immediate and significant increase in the flexibility and availability of the new storage infrastructure.

Impact on the business

"By using our ILM approach we were able to work out, together with the management, a storage infrastructure that takes into account the impact of storage processes on business processes, such as accessibility, recovery, availability and the value of data as time goes by. So we were able to incorporate the requirements more efficiently into our storage infrastructure," says Don O'Connor, Director of Operations and Support IPS at Getronics.

"ILM gave us many benefits, including the anticipated cost savings because we divided our storage infrastructure into high-end and lower-end systems. Previously we stored all our data on high-end EMC Symmetrix DMX systems, whereas now about two-thirds of our data are on Symmetrix DMX and one-third on EMC CLARiON."

Disk works faster than tape

Regarding the data from the tier I applications, such as SAP and MS Exchange, Getronics first makes a back-up onto disk and only after that onto tape. After all, if problems arise the company must be able to recover these data as quickly as possible. "What's more, we have to make back-ups of increasingly more data in shorter and shorter times, and in this case disk works a lot faster than tape," says Don O'Connor.

Another earlier unexpected benefit was the fact that the requirements Getronics placed on storage also turned out to be relevant to the entire computer and network environment. "So we've broadened the ILM concept to the whole IT infrastructure. Now the use of IT is even better tuned to our activities. The communication between the different departments and IT is also more spontaneous. The ILM approach enabled us to integrate companies taken over after a merger faster into the business," according to Don O'Connor.

Higher availability of e-mail

Setting up an ILM strategy made it possible for Getronics to consolidate and centralise the storage infrastructure into two data centres. This means the infrastructure is easier to manage, more flexible and simpler to adapt to future requirements. Moreover, by centralising the data storage Getronics is limiting the number of local workers needed for tasks such as putting tapes into servers or maintaining servers, and it can manage risk much better. "We're now in a position to easily resume business in the event of a disaster. Previously we had a failover site for this, where there was hardware that we weren't using. Because we now work with two live sites, we are making optimal use of our investment in hardware," says Don O'Connor.

One important issue was the consolidation of servers for MS Exchange, in which EMC played a strong supporting role. All the servers are now in the data centres, as a result of which their number has been reduced to a fifth of the number of servers that were originally located in each country. Moreover, before there were about 500 users per mail server and now there are some 3,500. "Thanks to the consolidation in the data centres and the use of EMC storage technology, the availability of the mail servers has increased from 99.5 to almost 100 percent," explains Don O'Connor.

Consolidation of servers thanks to VMWare

The software of EMC's daughter company, VMWare, is an essential tool at Getronics for achieving its aims. "We have now installed VMWare 8 times, with each VMWare application taking care of the consolidation of 15 servers. The migration of applications from the local servers to the data centre

now happens by means of a simple copy-paste keystroke. Virtual Motion, a component of VMWare, is really fantastic for moving applications while keeping them available, for example whenever we have to work on the systems. VMWare also accelerates the installation of new development and test environments. Previously our developers had to wait until the necessary hardware was available and configured, whereas now we can offer them a development environment in a few days," says Don O'Connor.



"Without SRDF we would lose at least 150,000 euros per hour during the synchronisation of data."

—Don O'Connor, Director of Operations and Support IPS at Getronics

Getronics also integrated EMC's replication software SRDF with VMWare. "We are synchronising large quantities of data between the storage systems in the two data centres with the help of SRDF, so we can prevent data loss efficiently. Without SRDF, in the case of a disaster, we would lose at least 150,000 euros per hour of lost production during the synchronisation of data and that is without taking into account possible loss of income as a result of this. Moreover, we would need about two days to bring an application back online," says Don O'Connor.

The combination of SRDF and VMWare helps to sharply reduce the maintenance costs of servers at a second location because VMWare can be used to create virtual servers at the remote location, each with access to copies of the production data. So in the event of an emergency business applications can restart quickly at a second location, at a fraction of the usual cost price. In fact, with VMWare a real server can hold several virtual servers, so that the hardware necessary is reduced.

Extra business and even more consolidation

A strong and credible image is very important for an IT services supplier such as Getronics. That's why here too business continuity counts as a great advantage of ILM. "We are now in a better position than ever to offer complete continuity of our services. As a result, customers now ask us for advice about implementing their business continuity solutions," says Don O'Connor.

Meanwhile Getronics is looking at other areas that it can consolidate, such as the file servers. "In this case too we're relying on the support and technology of EMC. So in the future, with the help of EMC's virtualisation software Invista, we want to extract even more benefits from our ILM strategy. After all, Invista can help us to migrate data even more smoothly," concludes Don O'Connor.



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