

School District Reduces Virtualization Costs with Acronis®



Oxford School District is one of Mississippi's 'High Performing' K-12 educational districts, with a National Blue Ribbon school and two Mississippi Department of Education award winning Level 5 (Superior-Performing) schools among its three elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. The school district has a commitment of proper IT funding from the superintendent on down to ensure "First in Class – the Oxford Way" educational support for its 2500 students.

To fulfill this commitment, the importance of centralized server resources has increased substantially, and the district has been careful to protect them properly. That is why, for four years, the district has used Acronis backup and recovery software to ensure the safety of eight terabytes of data.

A broad range of applications to protect...

Network administrator Mike Popernik has seen the IT operations for the district evolve over the last 13 years. He is responsible for 32 servers (many virtualized), linked over high-speed virtual private network fiber to approximately 2,000 PCs serving students, teachers and administrators. A streaming application server manages applications, including Microsoft SQL Exchange applications.

...and an upgraded version of Acronis software to protect them

Popernik has worked closely with the latest version of Acronis disk imaging-based backup and recovery software – Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 – as Oxford School District completed a recent software upgrade. And he established a virtualization initiative to reduce server costs and increase overall reliability.

While Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 Advanced Server includes support for up to four virtual machines hosted on a physical server at no extra charge, the district augmented those purchases with Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 Advanced Server Virtual Edition to take advantage of its unique three additional features that help save money without compromising performance:

- Agent-less backup to reduce administrative overhead
- Built-in data deduplication to cut data storage requirements
- Single-license price per physical server supporting unlimited virtual machines

Organization:

Oxford School District
www.oxford.k12.ms.us

Sector:

Education K-12

Key Challenges:

- Reduce the cost of virtualization
- Ensure access to applications from 2,000 workstations
- Speed Microsoft® Exchange recoveries

Environment:

- 32 Windows® and Linux® servers in a mixed physical and virtual machine environment, with 8 TB of backup storage
- Multiple Microsoft SQL™ applications, Microsoft Exchange and domain controller
- Dell® servers
- Offsite disaster recovery facility

Solution:

- Acronis® Backup & Recovery™ 10 Advanced Server Virtual Edition
- Acronis® Backup & Recovery™ 10 Advanced Server
- Acronis® Recovery for Microsoft® Exchange

Benefits:

- Cost of protecting each of nine virtual machines lowered about 40% through agent-less backup and high-value-per-license price structure
- Rapid image-based recoveries
- reduce email server downtime from as much as two days to just three hours
- Ease of use through user-friendly interface
- Supports both physical and virtual machines from the same console

Lowering the cost of protecting virtual machines

The Oxford IT team used Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 Advanced Server Virtual Edition to virtualize nine servers on a powerful Dell® 2950 Linux® server, among them the district's food service, Blackberry® and library servers. With it, the district improves ROI by saving about 40% of the purchase cost of two Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 Advanced Server licenses to support the same nine virtual machines. The cost of protecting each virtual server will continue to fall as the district adds virtual machines to the Dell 2950.

The district took advantage of Acronis' user-friendly wizard-driven interface to complete the transition. For example, it recovered its food server to a new virtual machine, brought down the physical server, then launched the virtual machine. *"We completed the conversion, including transferring 85 GB worth of data, in 30 minutes,"* Popernik reports. The district also appreciates Acronis' ability to manage virtual servers side by side with the same Acronis interface used to manage dedicated physical servers, including the school's domain server.

Disk imaging protects mail server

Acronis' patented disk imaging capability also helped the school district create a more robust Microsoft Exchange email environment. The server has a current backup disk requirement of about 500 GB. Because email is one of the lynchpins of the district's interdepartmental and intradepartmental communications, Oxford uses Acronis Recovery for Microsoft Exchange to carry out daily full folder backups ranging from just over 100 GB to nearly 200 GB. Recently, when the Exchange server was behaving in an unstable fashion, Oxford's IT team put Acronis to the test, and it passed. *"We took an image of the server, backed it up and restored the server on a new machine in three hours, with the actual backup of the data taking most of the time."*

Ease of use a big advantage

While Oxford School district is a devoted Acronis user, it likes to continually check it against competition in an effort to ensure it has the best possible solution. Ease of use is a big drawing card when a small IT team has to manage many systems and server many users, so when Popernik and his supervisor last tested Symantec Backup Exec, they commented, *"It takes a snapshot like Acronis, but it was a little more complicated to configure. For instance, you have to tell it in advance how much backup space it can use. If we allocate 4 GB and the backup volume is larger, it stops the backup at 4 GB."*

Acronis' has also simplified deployments. Take, for example, the time the school district replaced its student administration package. *"After building the server, we loaded the Acronis Backup & Recovery 10 plug-in and started running backups. It was so easy to configure Acronis and we had a backup completed in just 15 minutes,"* he says.

Looking to the future

Further server virtualization is in the works, and the school district built a fiber link to a second backup server sited at a disaster recovery location. Important information like user data, faculty and staff information and all Microsoft SQL database applications is duplicated there and protected by Acronis. Through the constant evolution of its IT environment, Acronis software remains a constant. *"Acronis is the most stable piece of software we have running now,"* Popernik says.

About Acronis

Acronis is a leading provider of easy-to-use backup, recovery and security solutions for physical, virtual and cloud environments. Its patented disk imaging technology enables corporations, SMBs and consumers to protect their digital assets. With Acronis' disaster recovery, deployment and migration software, users protect their digital information, maintain business continuity and reduce downtime. Acronis software is sold in more than 180 countries and available in 13 languages. For additional information, www.acronis.com. Follow Acronis on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/acronis>.



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