



COMPANY:

One of the largest diversified financial services firms

INDUSTRY:

Financial Services

PLATFORM:

Microsoft® Windows®, Sun Solaris™, Novell® NetWare®

APPLICATIONS:

File and print, Microsoft Exchange, Oracle® Database

CHALLENGES:

Migrate from DAS to a scalable, networked storage system operating within a heterogeneous OS environment

SOLUTION:

iSCSI-based storage solution providing on-demand storage capacity without disruption to application availability and with a standard feature set minimizing storage management requirements

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MESIROW FINANCIAL ADDRESSES A WIDER VARIETY OF STORAGE NEEDS – FOR LESS MONEY – BY SWITCHING FROM NAS TO PS SERIES ARRAYS

Founded in 1937, Mesirow Financial is one of the largest diversified financial services firms in Chicago. With more than 1,000 employees, in 26 offices nationwide, Mesirow reported fiscal 2004 revenues of more than \$298 million – marking record revenue growth in twelve consecutive years. In total, Mesirow has \$25.5 billion in assets under management, advisory and custody – and nearly \$150 million in capital.

Mesirow's financial transactions are handled by an IT infrastructure featuring more than 100 Compaq, Sun and Novell servers distributed across the company's 26 offices. The company's customer data is managed in a Sybase relational database, and Mesirow's e-mail is facilitated via Microsoft Exchange technology.

In the past, Mesirow had stored its data in Direct Attached Storage (DAS) and Network Attached Storage (NAS) solutions. But as the company continued to grow, Vice President of Server Administration Jay Walusek realized their current storage arrangement would not accommodate their long-term needs. Mesirow's need to increase its storage capacity was further magnified through the acquisition of another company – and Walusek and his team now had to accommodate 100 new employees in a single stroke.

Mesirow's M&A integration problems were exaggerated by the need to update the company's communications infrastructure. As Walusek planned an upgrade to Microsoft Exchange 2003, he realized their existing storage solutions couldn't provide the block level or file-based access they needed. The convergence of organic growth, a significant acquisition, and the need to support a company-wide infrastructure upgrade provided the perfect opportunity for Walusek to bolster his storage capabilities using a SAN-based solution.

"A few years back, we took an initial look at Fibre Channel SAN technology only to characterize our alternatives as ranging from the outrageous, to the ridiculous, in terms of price," said Walusek. "For a company our size, there was simply no way to justify the investment. But the emergence of the iSCSI-standard has produced solutions that can deliver equivalent storage capacity at one-tenth the cost of the Fibre Channel offerings we looked at just three years ago."

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*– Mesirow's VP of Server Administration
Jay Walusek*

Because Mesirow's infrastructure is heavily Microsoft-based, they sought an iSCSI-based storage vendor closely allied to Microsoft. After evaluating Network Appliance, Inc., Stonefly Networks™, and a few others, they found EqualLogic. "Our search turned out to be a simple one, because we felt EqualLogic's virtualization technology and snapshot capabilities were superior to anything else we've seen," states Walusek. "The PS Series array was the most robust iSCSI solution we evaluated, and it was also among the most cost-effective."

Mustafa Sayla, Mesirow's senior server administrator, assisted in the evaluation process and concurs with Walusek in their selection of EqualLogic. "The PS Series array was easy to set up and manage – requiring less than 20 minutes to install the front end and server connections," states Sayla. "The user interface is highly intuitive. By simply answering a few questions and running a command line set of utilities, we were able to get up-and-running without any problems."

VIRTUALIZATION AND REPLICATION CAPABILITIES

Although the comprehensiveness of the PS Series solution and its price point were critical initial selling features, both Walusek and Sayla agree that the PS Series' virtualization and replication capabilities provided the greatest value with respect to meeting Mesirow's long-term storage needs.

The PS Series' virtualization capabilities dynamically allocates storage once an administrator specifies the required capacity for a volume. In addition to setting up the physical disk space needed, the virtualization capabilities automatically create the RAID sets for each server – which significantly reduces the time, effort and knowledge required to manage storage. When new arrays are added, the PS Series' load-balancing technology automatically redistributes data across volumes to achieve maximum performance and efficiency. "The other vendors that we evaluated didn't pool storage from multiple arrays," states Walusek. "And as we installed PS Series arrays at our remote offices and added more data into the system, this intelligence became even more critical to us."

Mesirow addressed its backup and recovery issues with the PS Series' snapshot capabilities, which provide a "point-in-time" copy of a volume. They're also leveraging the PS Series' support for the Windows Server Shadow Copy Service, which helps users recover failed data in minutes, rather than hours. Also, PS Series arrays enable data to be mirrored, or copied to volumes deployed in remote locations, which ensures that duplicated data is kept safe should a primary repository fail. "The PS Series' snapshot capabilities are far more elegant than the Network Appliance solutions we evaluated," states Sayla. "Managing the snapshot schedules is surprisingly easy to do via the Web interface, and it doesn't take a lot of training to learn how to do it."

The initial SAN installation at Mesirow's main office worked so well, Walusek added several more PS Series arrays. He expanded the central SAN to complete the migration from DAS and added arrays at the firm's suburban offices while connecting them to headquarters via Gigabit Ethernet, enabling full data replication between the main office and the remote sites.

For Jay Walusek, the choice is simple, "The PS Series' virtualization capabilities hide the complexity of managing network storage. The snapshot features provide the backup and recovery capabilities we need to run our business, and the bottom line is that we've gotten better performance from our PS Series array than we got from our NAS solution, at a fraction of the cost."

SIMPLIFYING NETWORKED STORAGE

EqualLogic PS Series solutions deliver the benefits of storage consolidation in an intelligent, enterprise-class storage system that is easy to install, manage and grow. Let us show you what simplifying networked storage can mean for your business, visit our web site at www.equallogic.com.



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