

Glen Dimplex Home Appliances cooks up a high availability solution with Life IT



GDHA, part of the Glen Dimplex Group, is a leading global producer of domestic appliances, which consists of four established brands, Stoves, Belling, New World and LEC. They have 22% market share (GFK Aug 07), making them a key cooking company in the UK.

In 2006, GDHA consolidated its warehousing operations to a single 450,000 sq. ft. distribution centre. The facility included extensive automation based on barcoding of goods inwards, marshalling, load planning and goods outwards, linked directly to the company's Infor's JBA ERP solution, running on the IBM System i platform.

Overview

The Challenge

Increased reliance upon a new advanced warehousing system, new e-commerce sites and growing pressure to provide 24x7 systems availability were forcing Glen Dimplex to review their backup and disaster recovery solution. The existing tape based backup could not support 24 hour systems availability and extending operations would reduce any recovery time in the event of a critical failure.

The Solution

Glen Dimplex Home Appliances (GDHA) chose to work with Life IT to implement two new IBM System i520 servers running Maxava HA high availability software. The solution continuously mirrors production data to the backup server, eliminating the requirement to stop the live system to take a backup.

The Benefits

The Life IT and Maxava HA solution enables full recovery from a System i disaster within one hour, and supports 24/7 operations. By taking advantage of more competitive pricing and terms, the cost of the two new i520s was lower than the original cost expectations for a non-HA solution.

The disaster recovery plan at GDHA was based on a restore of the nightly tape backup to a new server, to be delivered should the worst happen. The company realised that at some point the backup would start to clash with operations, particularly as the company wished to extend the operating hours of the warehouse.

Jonathon Colley, Head Of IT, comments: "It became clear that the actual time to resume normal operations was in the order of three to four days. The new server might take six hours to arrive and install, then the tape restore could take 14 hours, losing at least one working day. When we added in allowances for system configuration, testing, rekeying of the 'lost' day and data catch-up, the impact was even more damaging to the operations."

Finding the right answer

After working closely with line-of-business managers to determine acceptable service levels, the team approached Life IT, an IBM Premier Business Partner, for advice and assistance in planning a new disaster recovery solution. The aim was to complete the daily backup without impacting operations, and reduce recovery to one hour or less.

Life IT proposed a new IT landscape based on two IBM System i520 servers, running Maxava HA high availability software to mirror data from production to backup continuously. At a stroke, the tape backup downtime window was eliminated allowing 24/7 operations. Should disaster strike, operations can be resumed within 1 hour due to the ability to fail-over within 30 minutes.

Jonathon Colley says, "Competitive hardware costs, software licence fees, termination of older lease agreements and lower maintenance contracts brought the cost for the twin-server high availability option below the original cost expectations of a data replication solution."

He adds, "Life IT fully understood our business requirements, and offered different solution variations until we had a price point and functionality offering that were right for us. In addition, Life IT had the product expertise to select and recommend Maxava HA from Maximum Availability Software as the best high-availability solution for our needs."

Migrating for more power

Life IT migrated the GDHA ERP software to a new IBM System i520, supporting around 270 concurrent users. The Maxava HA software continuously replicates data and transactions to a second, slightly less powerful, i520, at a second location. Maxava HA also replicates system objects – this is crucial as the software undergoes extensive continuous development and improvement.

In the case of fire, flood or other disaster affecting the production

server, users can be re-routed to the secondary server. With the exception of uncompleted transactions, there is no data or process loss, and the secondary server contains, in effect, a continuous live backup. The final step will be to move the existing tape backup to the secondary server.

"Our tests have shown that we can complete re-routing and failover comfortably within an hour. The Maxava HA software has no appreciable system overhead, and runs reliably in the background," says Jonathon Colley.

Sweating the assets

With the solution in place, GDHA has already identified benefits not originally part of the business case.

Customers using the Web to check stock availability and purchase Glen Dimplex Home Appliance products are accessing the IBM DB2 database used by the production software. Stock and delivery information is updated hourly, with sales orders now being processed outside normal working hours including evenings and weekends.

Warehousing and distribution activities at Glen Dimplex operate for 16 hours daily. With the integration of another major electrical brand, LEC, a review of warehousing and distribution processes is underway, including 24x7 operations which could lead to improved asset utilisation.

Indirectly, the analysis and solution of the disaster recovery planning has led the company to an ideal foundation for strategic business expansion and adoption of operational changes.

"Being able to introduce 24/7 warehousing is essential for the business, as it sweats the assets and allows the company to grow in the most cost-efficient manner," says Jonathon Colley.

"The warehouse operates a real-time stock management system, which we can now use overnight to prepare shipments to retailers and consumers, for early despatch and delivery the next day. This will allow

inclusion of stock arriving later that day at the distribution centre for inclusion in shipments the next day. Consumers receive a better service, stock turn is improved, warehouse efficiency rises, and even the trailer utilisation is improved."

Jonathon Colley concludes, "In providing the excellent i520 and Maxava HA solution, Life IT enabled Glen Dimplex Home Appliances to gain exactly the right high availability solution for our needs at a surprisingly affordable price."

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Jonathon Colley
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