



Northeast Delta Dental

Taming storage growth with automated EMC archiving solution

Benefits

- Saves primary file space by archiving all images older than three months (nearly three terabytes regained initially)
- Eliminates manual intervention by IT staff through automated archiving based on policies
- Reduces time to retrieve archived information from hours to seconds with no IT involvement
- Improves customer service and speeds industry audits with nearly instant, direct end-user access to archived images

Business overview

Northeast Delta Dental specializes in the administration of dental programs, and administers these programs to more than 650,000 people through its network of 1,465 participating dentists in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The company has become the leader in the dental marketplace by promoting its unique qualities: its dentists' commitments embodied in Delta Dental's participating agreement; its quality plan designs; its expertise in claims administration; and its dedication to outstanding service and recognition of the equality of the importance of all concerned parties—purchasers, subscribers, and dentists.

Challenges

Northeast Delta Dental's traditional approach of storing scanned claim images on file servers and manually archiving them to tape and optical media was no longer satisfying the demands of customer service representatives who work with customers and the dental offices to research claim questions. Retrieval of images from tape or optical media was slow and required intervention by Northeast Delta Dental's IT staff. In addition, as the number of dental insurance claims continued to grow, the archiving process required increasing amounts of hands-on administration, costing Northeast Delta Dental time and money.

Today, Northeast Delta Dental has changed all that, applying the principles of Information Lifecycle Management (ILM) by setting policies in EMC® DiskXtender® software to automatically archive images after three months from file servers to EMC Centera™ storage.

EMC software solution

Northeast Delta Dental administers nearly 1.5 million dental benefit claims each year. Storing and indexing this volume of information, along with growing numbers of scanned dental x-rays and PDF files of accounting reports, could cripple an organization still dependent on outmoded technology.

Northeast Delta Dental has implemented a highly efficient archiving strategy employing EMC DiskXtender software with EMC Centera Governance Edition content-addressed storage, enabling the company to manage this growth with ease. In the process, Northeast Delta Dental has freed nearly three terabytes of valuable file space, while simplifying storage management and accelerating retrieval of insurance claims and dental x-rays from hours to just seconds.

Business profile

Northeast Delta Dental

Provider of dental benefits for over 650,000 people via its network of 1,465 participating dentists across Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont

Industry

Commercial dental benefits provider

Geographies

Corporate offices in Concord, New Hampshire; serving Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont

Business solution

Data archiving

EMC products

EMC DiskXtender, EMC Centera Governance Edition content-addressed storage

Deployment summary

The highly efficient archiving strategy enables the company to manage growth with ease, save valuable file space, simplify storage management, and accelerate data retrieval

Dan Kaplan, manager of networking and technical support for Northeast Delta Dental, said, “The number of dental claims has grown in the last year as we’ve attracted a larger customer base and expanded our network of dentists. As a result, we were spending more and more time moving data instead of putting value into our IT services. With DiskXtender, there’s no longer any need for our IT staff to be involved in manually moving data—it’s completely hands off.”

He continued, “Because the software keeps track of where each file is on the archive, insurance administrators and customer service representatives can continue to access the archived images in seconds instead of waiting hours for us to manually search for the right tape and go through a lengthy restore process. Centera also allows us to scale very economically, so we can handle the growth and still maintain high performance for our users. What this means is more efficient use of both IT resources and customer service representative time. In the end, that translates to improved service to our insurance customers and member dentists.”

EMC Services delivers clear-cut strategy for speeding access to archived images

Prior to implementing the EMC archiving solution, Northeast Delta Dental stored scanned insurance claims and dental x-rays on Windows-based file servers, keeping the images there as long as possible until nearly all of the available three terabytes of storage on the file servers were consumed. The company’s IT staff would then schedule a batch job to move approximately one terabyte of the oldest claim images from the file servers onto LTO (Linear Tape Open) tapes and delete those files on the file server. Once the images were moved, the tapes were labeled and stored off site. At this point, any request for an older image required hours to locate the right tape, restore its content, and then find the requested insurance claim. With dentists and insurance customers submitting up to 5,000 new claims each day, Northeast Delta Dental realized there had to be a better solution.

Northeast Delta Dental brought in EMC Services to perform an assessment of the data residing on its file servers. The assessment identified all the stored insurance claims and dental x-rays that were no longer actively referenced, charting the file ages and providing projections for short-term and long-term storage requirements. This valuable information became the foundation for configuring Northeast Delta Dental’s archive solution and for establishing policies for archiving static images from the file servers and archiving them to Centera storage.

“We knew that 98 percent of the insurance claims are paid in fifteen days and that the rest are typically paid within a month,” said Kaplan. “Once a claim is paid, it’s rarely needed again, but we were still keeping all these old claim images on the file servers. EMC Services had the expertise we needed to find all the files that were just sitting there unused, and to validate that nearly all those images became static after one month. With the professionalism and documented results that EMC Services provided, we had a lot of confidence that archiving these older images was the right thing to do.”

Maximizing efficiency with hands-off data archiving

Now confident in its archiving strategy, Northeast Delta Dental worked with EMC to determine the best combination of software and hardware to move static files on a systematic basis off the expensive file servers. The solution of choice: DiskXtender software with Centera content-addressed storage.

“We looked at other archiving solutions, but decided to go with DiskXtender and Centera because of EMC’s reputation in the industry,” noted Kaplan. “We felt that EMC would provide products that worked the way they said they would, and also that we’d have better support. Both of these assumptions turned out to be right.”

EMC provided complete implementation services for the DiskXtender software and Centera storage. Based on the recommendations of EMC Services, Northeast Delta Dental then set up policies in DiskXtender to automatically move images after three months from the file servers to the Centera archive. In addition, EMC implemented a second Centera in a separate building, with Centera Archive Replicator software used to replicate archived data for added disaster recovery protection.

“We have gained back significant space on our file servers with DiskXtender. We recovered nearly three terabytes that have been repurposed for other applications, allowing us to get more value out of that investment and saving the cost of buying additional file servers.”

Dan Kaplan, Manager of Networking and Technical Support, Northeast Delta Dental

Slashing retrieval time from hours to seconds

With DiskXtender and Centera in operation, Northeast Delta Dental no longer requires large amounts of file server space just to house images, and its IT staff is now freed from the task of backing up or retrieving those images using tape. As a result, the efficiency of customer service representatives serving dentists and insurance customers has increased significantly, enabling Northeast Delta Dental to respond to claims questions or problems promptly and effectively.

“DiskXtender takes a lot of burden off our IT staff,” stated Kaplan. “DiskXtender simply follows the policies we set, so there’s a tremendous amount of data that we just don’t have to worry about moving around any more. And once an insurance claim or dental x-ray is archived, it is still easily accessible by our customer service representatives. They simply click on the file they want and the image is available in seconds, rather than the hours it used to take for us to retrieve from tape. Now there’s no need for our staff to get involved at all, which not only saves us time, but also allows our representatives to get the information they need faster to serve our customers and dentists.”

“We have also gained back significant space on our file servers with DiskXtender,” continued Kaplan. “We recovered nearly three terabytes that have been repurposed for other applications, allowing us to get more value out of that investment and saving the cost of buying additional file servers.”

Enabling secure, long-term retention with easy access

The combination of DiskXtender and Centera also enables Northeast Delta Dental to meet the requirements of state departments of insurance more effectively. To comply with the rules of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont—where Northeast Delta Dental does business—claims must be retained for seven years with controls to make sure they are not altered or at risk for loss. In addition, they must be accessible for state auditors. With Centera Governance Edition and DiskXtender software, Northeast Delta Dental can meet these requirements with confidence.

“We are under scrutiny by three state departments of insurance and must be able to respond promptly to their requests for information,” explained Kaplan. “Centera and DiskXtender provide the assurance that our archived insurance claims are secure and authentic by not only capturing the content, but also maintaining its context and structure. And because the archived claims are so easy to access, auditors can get the information they need quickly. That nearly eliminates any participation by IT staff and allows the department of insurance auditors to retrieve the information they need with minimal disruption.”

Extending the value of ILM

Having realized the benefits of archiving and ILM for its insurance claims and dental x-rays, Northeast Delta Dental is also considering archiving other static information such as older e-mails. By using DiskXtender with EMC EmailXtender®, Northeast Delta Dental will be able to automatically archive infrequently accessed e-mail messages and content onto Centera storage, extending the value of ILM to further optimize the use of different storage tiers as the value of data changes over time.

“With the ability to set policies for mapping data to the most cost-effective storage and further deploy ILM, we see many opportunities to continually optimize the amount of application data kept on primary storage,” said Kaplan. “As we plan to extend this capability to our e-mail application with another EMC solution—EmailXtender—ILM will help us improve application performance and reduce the amount of data requiring backup. We are also looking at using DiskXtender to purge files from the archive automatically once the retention period is passed, further economizing on our storage.”

“We put a lot of trust in EMC to recommend the right solution to meet our changing needs,” concluded Kaplan. “I know when it comes time to expand our use of ILM and DiskXtender, they will provide knowledgeable advice and expert technical services to help us get the most out of our investments.”



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Customer Profile
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