

FARM CREDIT BANK OF TEXAS

EMC Replication Manager automates replication with full application consistency to protect business-critical Microsoft SharePoint infrastructure



ESSENTIALS

Challenges

- A large number of databases in the Microsoft SharePoint infrastructure made native Microsoft SQL Server replication methods ineffective
- Lengthy timeframes associated with traditional backups limited data protection and increased the risk of data loss

Solution

- Automated Disaster Recovery
 - EMC Replication Manager automated application data replication
 - EMC MirrorView data mirroring
 - EMC unified storage
 - VMware vSphere virtualization solution

Key benefits

- Full application consistency between SharePoint and SQL Server applications
- Transformed data protection from 18-hour tape backups to replicating three times a day
- Reduced recovery time from 25 to 30 hours to three hours
- Cut administration time from four or five hours to five minutes

Farm Credit Bank of Texas is a cooperatively owned wholesale bank with assets of \$13.9 billion, providing loan funds and services through 17 retail lending co-ops and four other financing institutions for rural real estate, agribusiness, and agricultural production.

As part of its disaster recovery plan, the Austin-based bank was spending several hours backing up numerous Microsoft® SQL Server® databases to tape in its Microsoft SharePoint® infrastructure. This time-consuming approach did not provide the bank with a reliable recovery time objective for the application. In addition, the bank risked the loss of critical operational data, loan records, and procedural information and also faced the challenges of a lengthy recovery process.

“SharePoint has become a predominant application since it manages our workflow, collaboration, and sharing of thousands of critical documents,” says Scott Windham, Network Operations Manager. “However, with SharePoint backups taking 16 to 18 hours, we couldn’t ensure protection on a nightly basis.”

“Managing the log shipping process was also very labor intensive—especially when testing recovery,” he added. “We needed a way to protect our SharePoint infrastructure that didn’t come with such a huge administrative burden.”

AUTOMATED REMOTE DATA REPLICATION

Farm Credit implemented EMC Replication Manager to protect its SharePoint application data supported on more than 100 SQL Server databases. Replication Manager orchestrates the creation of application-consistent, point-in-time snapshots of the SQL Server databases in coordination with EMC SnapView™. The solution also automatically manages EMC MirrorView® asynchronous replication of those snapshots from EMC CLARiiON® storage in the bank’s Austin production data center to a second CLARiiON system in a co-located disaster recovery site 80 miles away.

Farm Credit’s information infrastructure is comprised of 100 percent EMC unified storage. Using a VMware® vSphere™ virtualization solution, the bank has virtualized 75 percent of its infrastructure, including the front-end SharePoint servers.

“Replication Manager is the only solution we found that provides the Microsoft application integration we needed to gain true disaster recovery for our SharePoint environment,” says Windham. “All the other third-party products we evaluated came up short.”

ENSURING DATA CONSISTENCY AND PROTECTION

With Replication Manager, Farm Credit has gained much needed data consistency between SharePoint and more than 100 SQL Server databases, assuring data protection in the event of a disaster.

“A key advantage of Replication Manager is its ability to closely interact with both the SharePoint and SQL Server applications, as well as the CLARiiON storage,” notes Windham. “Before, with MirrorView replication alone, we couldn’t be sure that the data we sent to the disaster recovery site would necessarily be usable when we got it back. Now, using Replication Manager, we’re getting data consistency from end to end.”

Windham also points out that Replication Manager has eliminated lengthy backups as the means for disaster recovery data protection, improving reliability and recoverability.

“Because of the efficiency of Replication Manager, we are able to replicate our entire SharePoint data set three times a day,” says Windham. “The more often we replicate, the less time it takes for every replication. And by replicating more frequently, we have several points in time that we can recover to, which minimizes the risk of any data loss.”

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SCOTT WINDHAM, NETWORK OPERATIONS MANAGER

REDUCING RECOVERY TIME TENFOLD

With Replication Manager, speed of recovery has also improved dramatically for the bank.

“When our only option was restoring from tape, we estimated recovery time to be 25 to 30 hours,” recalls Windham. “Now, in tests using Replication Manager, we’re able to restore our SharePoint infrastructure and have it running again in just three hours. That means 1,200 users can continue their work serving our rural customers with little to no disruption.”

Windham adds, “With our previous method of data protection, we risked having to recreate a tremendous amount of information—thousands of documents, loan records, procedural information, and forms—all critical to our everyday operations. And we also weren’t sure we could even recreate it all. So, knowing that we can recover to a point just a few hours in the past takes the worry away and avoids the potential for lost productivity and income generation in the business.”

SIMPLIFYING DISASTER RECOVERY ADMINISTRATION

Since implementing Replication Manager, Windham has shed the huge administrative burden associated with tape-based backup and recovery.

“Managing the backup process took at least four to five hours each day,” he says. “With Replication Manager, it takes me about five minutes to read a couple of email reports and see that everything is replicating the way it should. Then I don’t have to worry about it for the rest of the day. It has freed up a lot of time that I now spend on more strategic projects to improve the business rather than storage administration.”

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