

Customer Case Study: Nodak Mutual Insurance Company

Critical Issue

When Nodak Mutual relied on an old-style backup and recovery strategy, which employed tape-based backups and a third-party recovery site, it would have taken days to resume full operations after a disaster. That was far too long. The company needed a way to keep its business running no matter what may occur.

Results

- Protects operations from downtime
- Provides greater insight into system operations
- Very easy to use and manage
- Provides peace of mind

Technology

Software:

- Assure iTERA HA
- Mix of custom-developed and packaged software
- IBM i

Hardware:

- IBM 8203 Power Systems server (production)
- IBM 8202 Power Systems server (backup)

Business Challenge

Since Furi Group covers auto, real estate, chain operation and finance sectors, it needs to find an OA data protection system capable of meeting multi-sector business needs and offering forward compatibility to support future IT expansion of the group.

In addition, Furi Group has limited budget for the project, so how to build a cost-effective and highly available data protection environment has become key to the project.

Company Name

Nodak Mutual Insurance Company

Headquarters:

Fargo, North Dakota, USA

Industry:

Insurance

Business Environment:

- Life, home, auto, farm, crop and business insurance and other financial products
- Employees: About 125
- Largest property & casualty insurer domiciled in North Dakota

Implementation Team:

Nodak Mutual and Precisely

Solution

Nodak Mutual operates primarily during normal weekday business hours. Thus, system maintenance performed at night or on weekends has minimal impact on its business. However, natural disasters and hardware failures obviously can't be scheduled. If they result in downtime during business hours the consequences would be disruptive and costly.

In the past, Nodak's disaster recovery (DR) strategy consisted of creating backup tapes and shipping them to a third-party recovery site in Phoenix, Arizona. If a disaster struck the primary data center in Fargo, North Dakota, it would have taken days to allocate a system at the recovery site, configure that system, load all of the data and applications from backup tapes, test the system, and finally make the applications available to users. During that time, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct business.

To make matters worse, the DR provider allowed only 24 hours of testing time per year, all of which had to be contiguous. This did not afford Nodak adequate confidence that the recovery solution would indeed work as required if a disaster struck.

Nodak needed a DR solution that would dramatically reduce recovery times, while delivering the peace of mind of a well-tested solution.

Solution

About two and a half years ago, Nodak Mutual implemented a high availability and DR solution that fulfilled all of its requirements: Assure iTERA HA. Assure iTERA HA replicates all data and applications in real-time from the company's primary IBM i-based production server to a Nodak-owned hot-standby backup server located in a third-party facility some distance away.

Should the primary system become unavailable for any reason, Assure iTERA HA can quickly complete a failover to the backup system with minimal downtime.

Nodak has not yet experienced an event that shut down the primary data center and required a failover, but annual failover tests ensure that the solution will reliably protect business continuity should a disaster strike. In addition, Nodak regularly uses Assure iTERA HA's "virtual roll swap" feature to verify the readiness of the backup system, without affecting production operations in any way.

For Nodak Mutual, the primary benefit of Assure iTERA HA is peace of mind. The company uses IBM i-based Power Systems servers, which are among the most reliable systems on the market today, so hardware failures are exceptionally rare. Disasters are at least equally infrequent.

“The number one benefit we receive from Assure iTERA HA is the peace of mind that comes with a high availability solution we can trust, knowing that if we have a disaster we can be up and running in a short period of time”.

**– Larry Marxen,
Director of Information Services**

Nevertheless, "rare" and "infrequent" are not synonyms for "never." The company is not prepared to accept even a small risk of significant downtime. Fortunately, with Assure iTERA HA, it doesn't have to. And the ability to test the solution, including non-disruptive virtual roll swap tests, gives Nodak complete confidence that the solution will work as advertised when required.

Peace of mind may be the biggest benefit, but it is not the only one. "Assure iTERA gives you better insight into your system," explained Larry Marxen, director of information services.

"If anything has been updated in a library, if there is a disabled user profile, if libraries are added or if users are added you get notifications of that because of what Assure iTERA is tracking."