precisely

Case Study:
National Distribution Alliance

Critical Issue

Data and application availability are critical to NDA's business. Consequently, it needs a disaster recovery solution that allows for much faster recovery and more complete protection than tape-based backups, and with less room for human error.

Results

- Replicates data in real time
- Allows for almost immediate recovery
- Eliminates human error
- Allows for creation of realistic test environments
- Provides peace of mind

Business Challenge

At one time, NDA protected its data by backing it up to tape nightly. However, that was inadequate because recoveries were too slow and once-a-day backups left too much data vulnerable to loss.

One of the problems with nightly tape-based backups is the nightly part. Data entered or updated during the current day is not yet on any backup tape. Consequently, up to a day's worth of data is always at risk—and more if the most recent tape is unavailable or corrupted.

Another problem with nightly tape-based backups is the tape part. To perform a recovery, the backup tape has to be retrieved, possibly from an offsite location, it has to be mounted onto a drive and the necessary data have to be extracted and loaded unto the production server. In the event of a disaster, it might also be necessary to first acquire and configure a new server. In all, recovery can take hours or even a few days. For a dynamic business like NDA, that's far too long.

In addition, tape backups and recoveries involve many manual processes to locate, transport and mount tapes and run the necessary jobs. And, humans are fallible and, consequently, manual processes create opportunities for error.

NDA recognized that it needed a disaster recovery solution that protects all of its data, allows data to be recovered almost immediately and minimizes the chance of human error.

Solution

NDA now has a disaster recovery solution that is far more robust than was possible with tape-based alternatives. NDA uses Assure MIMIX DR for AIX to protect the AIX environment it uses to run its business.

Client profile

National Distribution Alliance (NDA)

- Represents hundreds of local, national and international publishers
- Delivers time-sensitive periodicals to 10,000 New York Metro area retailers daily
- Operates 365 days a year
- Employees: 100

"Assure MIMIX DR provides up-to-thesecond replication and immediate availability of data, with no human error—and it lets me sleep at night."

- John Baudille, VP, Technology and Information Services

Assure MIMIX DR for AIX monitors a production server for changes and immediately replicates them to a second server that can quickly assume the production role if the primary server becomes unavailable due to a storage or server failure, human error, a disaster or any other cause.

Assure MIMIX DR for AIX replicates only changes to production data, and can optionally utilize compression with its WAN-optimized data transmission. Consequently, its bandwidth requirements are low, making replication practical whether you are replicating data within a building or to the other side of the world.

The automation provided by Assure MIMIX DR for AIX also eliminates most of the manual processes required for tape-based backup and recovery. In addition to providing labor savings, this improves the accuracy of the processes as it automates the disaster recovery runbook, thereby saving time, ensuring best practices and eliminating human error.

Furthermore, because Assure MIMIX DR replicates data in real-time, it can support aggressive Recovery Point Objectives (RPOs). Whereas nightly tape backups can leave considerable recent data unprotected, Assure MIMIX DR leaves virtually no data exposed.

Online recovery is, obviously, also much faster than tape-based recovery. Whereas recovering from tape can take hours or even days, Assure MIMIX DR for AIX allows NDA to recover data within minutes if a disaster were to occur.

In addition, Assure MIMIX DR provides true Continuous Data Protection (CDP), which allows NDA to recover data not just up to a moment of failure, but also to any point in time. John Baudille, VP of Technology and Information Services, considers this to be a valuable feature, particularly if an application problem were to corrupt data. With CDP, NDA can recover data to the point immediately before the problem occurred and then move forward. In contrast, without CDP, the company would typically have to write a program to correct the corruption.

Assure MIMIX DR also provides a feature that allows NDA to create a snapshot of its data at any point in time. The company uses this to generate test environments that fully and accurately reflect the real-life production environment, enabling more reliable application testing.

What is the biggest benefit that Assure MIMIX DR for AIX provides to NDA? Baudille didn't have to think long to answer that question. He replied, "It allows me to sleep at night."

Peace of mind. That's the Assure MIMIX DR for AIX advantage.

Technology used
Software:
• Assure MIMIX DR for AIX
• IBM® AIX®
Hardware:
• 2 x IBM Power 720 Express server, Model 8202