Case Study:

Strategic Fulfillment Group

Critical Issue

In the age of e-commerce, competitors are literally a click away. And if you can't fulfill an order, customers may be able to cancel it with a click as well. Operating in this environment, Strategic Fulfillment Group, which provides order fulfillment services—from order taking through to picking and shipment—to a number of customers, can't afford to lose access to its data and applications. No exceptions.

Business Challenge

Strategic Fulfillment Group (SFG) considers itself to be a medium-sized company, but you wouldn't know it from its IT environment. The company employs multiple IBM i-based Power Systems servers with multiple partitions. Those systems run a collection of thousands of in-house developed applications, as well as purchased software that has been integrated into the company's IT systems.

One of SFG's major selling points is that it delivers its services through a single relational database. The primary benefit of this is that customers, which SFG views as partners, can expand into new lines of business without having to worry about the complexities of integrating data from different databases for different company divisions.

SFG's central database contains millions of names and addresses. In total, there are about 14-billion records, and growing. SFG also makes considerable use of IBM i's Integrated File System (IFS).

SFG's business environment demands an exceptionally high level of data and application availability. Yet finding a way to ensure near-zero downtime and zero data loss in such a large and complex IT environment was problematic.

Company Name:

Strategic Fulfillment Group

Headquarters:

Big Sandy, Texas, USA

Industry:

Sales Fulfillment

Business Environment:

- Founded: 1997 (Parent co.: 1925)
- Employees: About 250
- 3rd largest fulfillment services company in USA
- Considers customers to be partners

Implementation Team:

Strategic Fulfillment Group and Precisely

Solution

Precisely is the premier provider of disaster recovery (DR) and high availability (HA) solutions for IBM i. It offers reliable, high performance HA/DR solutions that fulfill the needs of practically every organization, no matter how large, complex or unique its IT environment may be.

Being a mid-sized IBM i shop, SFG initially chose Assure MIMIX HA, Precisely's IBM i-based HA/DR solution designed for small to medium-sized businesses (SMBs). However, the company's database was as large, its use of IFS as extensive, and its systems as complex as those of far larger companies. Consequently, in consultation with Precisely's, it was determined that Assure MIMIX HA with its Assure MIMIX Global add-on for multi-server HA/DR would better provide the enterprise level performance and scalability required by SFG's environment and high transaction volumes.

Precisely then helped SFG to migrate to Assure MIMIX HA. "From the beginning, Precisely's greatly impressed us with its commitment to us," declared John Trotter, Director of Information Services. "They really stepped up to the plate."

Assure MIMIX HA leverages IBM i's advanced remote journaling features, along with other change capture and replication mechanisms, to transparently replicate applications, data and system state information in real time from a production server to a recovery server. Assure MIMIX thus ensures that the recovery server is always a complete, ready-to-run replica.

Two of SFG's Power Systems servers host seven logical partitions that serve the business' operational needs. This includes two clusters of three logical partitions. One cluster includes web server LPARs. The other includes the production LPARs where the backend database and all of SFG's customers' data reside.

SFG uses Assure MIMIX HA to replicate from the production partitions on each server to backup partitions on the other server in real time. Should either server become unavailable, the other can quickly assume the full production load. SFG also takes advantage of Assure MIMIX HA's data protection reports to ensure that what the company wants to be replicated is indeed being replicated.

These servers are separated by about 25 miles. Thus, even if a disaster should knock out one of the sites, full operations could resume at the other site with almost no interruption.

Just how short is "almost no interruption?" Trotter has a precise answer. SFG has performed role swaps. During one of those swaps, web cluster downtime was only four minutes and nine seconds. SFG thus sees Assure MIMIX HA as an invaluable way to prevent disruptions of its partners' business operations.

As pleased as he is with Assure MIMIX HA, Trotter is particularly impressed with the service and support he receives from Precisely. "I've worked with IBM equipment since I was a junior trainee in 1969. And I would put Precisely's customer service and technical support at the highest echelon of any vendor I've worked with."

Results

- Minimal downtime due to all causes
- Ensured continuous operations
- HA/DR protection that keeps pace with very high transaction volumes
- Support for recovery point objectives of zero data loss
- HA/DR coverage for the most complex of environments and the largest of data stores

Technologies

Software:

- Assure MIMIX HA
- Assure MIMIX Global add-on to Assure MIMIX HA for multi-server HA/DR

Hardware:

- IBM Power Systems servers

"What impresses me the most is the depth of Precisely's commitment to treating us as a partner, listening to us, and working with us... I would put Precisely's customer service and technical support at the highest echelon of any vendor I've worked with."

— John Trotter, Director of Information Services

precisely.com | 877 700 0970