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Success Story

Manchester Grammar School Turns to NetApp Storage to Underpin Massive Growth Requirements

Success Story

Manchester Grammar School, one of the UK's leading independent schools, with an enviable reputation both at home and abroad, turns to NetApp® storage to underpin massive growth in end-user storage requirements while also underpinning the school's business growth and reputation.

Customer Profile

Manchester Grammar School (MGS) is the largest independent day school for boys aged between 7 and 18 in the UK. Academically it is one of the most outstanding schools in the country, with pupils also achieving success both nationally and internationally in sports, music, drama, and many other areas.

MGS was originally founded in 1515 by a local resident, Hugh Oldham, who went on to become the Bishop of Exeter. Clearly, since then the school has evolved and today stands on a 28-acre site at Fallowfield, Manchester.

Today MGS is recognised as an establishment that, as well as promoting and encouraging academic rigor, also contributes to social diversity and the wider community.

The school has a strong commitment to social mobility; over 200 of it's pupils from low income families receive means-tested bursaries to cover the cost of school fees. In addition, it recently introduced a junior school for pupils aged from seven to eleven.

The school has approximately 1,500 students and 300 staff.

The Challenge

Approximately seven years ago, the school went from having around 400 workstations to 1,100 devices, including tablets and other mobile devices. The move coincided with the opening of its junior school and the introduction of computing into the curriculum.

Richard Wilcock, Head of Computer Services, MGS, explains, "Growth wasn't overnight. It was more gradual, but that said, we basically went from a relatively medium-sized computing operation to enterprise-level computing due to this massive growth."

Given this surge in computers, the existing storage platform was essentially unable to cope with the new and increased demands. For instance, it became inefficient and costly to maintain and expand.

"It made sense given that we were looking for a storage platform to find a partner that was well versed and experienced in this type of technology."

Richard Wilcock
Head of Computer Services, MGS

"Data protection at MGS also relied on traditional disk to disk to tape, which with the new storage requirements was sometimes slow. For example, the data protection method and disaster recovery would enable the recovery of single files or virtual machines, but such a process could take a number of hours."

Richard adds, "When we were relatively small, we didn't need these features, but the move to a much larger computing model obviously had implications for our existing IT infrastructure, and in particular we needed to re-assess our storage platform and needs."

The Solution

As a precursor to sourcing a new storage platform, the school also looked for a new technology partner. "It made sense given that we were looking for a storage platform, to find a partner that was well versed and experienced in this type of technology" adds Richard.

MGS chose to partner with LIMA Networks, a Manchester-based infrastructure specialist that proposed a solution largely based on NetApp technology. "Everything about the LIMA proposal made sense, from the suggested technology platform to pre-sales and post-sales support, lifecycle management, and the design of the platform," says Richard.

The platform was based around the NetApp FAS2552 and FAS2520 and NetApp SnapMirror®. This FAS2500 range has specifically been designed to accelerate workloads and increase usable capacity, important points for MGS seeking to accommodate surging growth in storage requirements.

The platform was designed to upgrade primary storage to a more efficient platform and improve the recoverability of the most critical applications in use at the school.

Using both FAS2552 and FAS2520, a SAN-to-SAN replication model was created to a disaster recovery location in the event of system failure, which would help provide the continuation of the school's IT services with minimal disruption.

Business Benefits
Bolstering the brand

The new NetApp storage platform is underpinning the school's continued success and business operations. Richard says, "Manchester Grammar School is a prestigious organisation. Within this context, storage platform failures could be damaging to our reputation. With the NetApp platform, we do not have these concerns because it is so reliable."

Robust disaster recovery

The NetApp storage platform has helped MGS reclaim 40% of disk storage whilst also dramatically improving the ability to recover the most critical applications in the school. The platform's SAN-to-SAN replication to a disaster recovery location helps make sure that data is safe and recoverable in the event of a system failure and also means the school is complying with mandatory requirements concerning data storage.

Cost effective, flexible, robust, and high performing

The platform based on NetApp included all hardware and software support for five years, which was equivalent to the cost of maintaining the school's existing systems for the same period. This not only represented significant cost savings for MGS but also provided the school with a much more flexible and high-performing system that accommodates future growth and a reliable and easy-to-manage disaster recovery system.

"It is storage with added benefits such as smarter backups, quick restores, and more storage with a few simple clicks. No other storage vendor could provide this, and we have been able to shrink our storage environment while also gaining greater storage capacity."

Richard Wilcock
Head of Computer Services, MGS

Time savings

With the previous MGS storage platform, an entire data backup used to take a whole weekend to complete, from Friday evening to Monday morning, with differential backups performed each evening. With the NetApp system, a full backup is now performed twice a day to capture data changes during and after the school day. Almost 8TB of data is backed up almost instantly.

Shrinking storage footprint One

of the compelling features of the NetApp platform for Richard was that the NetApp technology provides much more than storage. "It is storage with added benefits such as smarter backups, quick restores, and more storage with a few simple clicks. No other storage vendor could provide this, and we have been able to shrink our storage environment while also gaining greater storage capacity," he says.

High praise and productive

Richard manages a four-person IT team. He observes that as a result of the NetApp platform, the team is now freed up to concentrate on more productive work rather than having to manage storage requirements. "The team thinks the platform is excellent. We're not spending time on storage any longer, and we can focus on other work and projects," he says.

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

- NetApp FAS2552
- NetApp FAS2520
- NetApp SnapMirror
- VMware® vCenter™, ESXi™
- Symantec™ Backup Exec™ and NDMP

Partner

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