



Success Story

Wrekin Housing Trust Plans for Future Growth with FlexPod® Platform

The Wrekin Housing Trust

Another NetApp
solution delivered by:



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry

Housing

The Challenge

Need for business continuity support for its current operations but also a solution that could factor in future expansion.

The Solution

Implement a FlexPod® architecture to benefit from server virtualization and industry-leading data storage features that enable economic and robust data transfer across a WAN.

Benefits

- Server virtualization from 50 to 5 servers
- Industry-leading deduplication and data Snapshot technology
- Lower costs
- Centralized management
- Future-proofed business continuity
- Low latency for high-performance applications

Customer Profile

The Wrekin Housing Trust is one of the largest social housing providers in the West Midlands, with almost 12,000 homes for rent across Shropshire and Staffordshire.

At one end of the scale, it provides low-cost home ownership. At the other end, it offers a raft of supportive services ranging from retirement living schemes to an able-living service for tenants who have special physical needs. Its extra care housing developments have their own self-contained flats with on-site care. The main aim is to encourage and promote independence by enabling people to live in their own homes, but with the support they need to be safe and happy.

The services it provides are delivered under the umbrella of The Wrekin Housing Group together with a raft of partners: Choices Housing Association, The Shropshire Housing Alliance, South Shropshire Furniture Scheme and Revive, it endeavours to make a real difference to its tenants.

How We Helped

As the trust has grown and new partnerships forged, its dependence on information storage systems and computing resources to provide an always available, responsive, and reliable service has grown significantly.

Over the years Wrekin Housing Trust's data center has grown in importance. It is strategic not only to the trust's operations but also to those of its group partners. The data center hosted 50 different application servers, each with its own data storage.

With ever-increasing data volumes and resource-intensive backups, a more robust business continuity and recovery plan was required to meet the trust's recovery point and time objectives. In short, the trust was looking for a converged data center that would support its current needs but also provide enough flexibility to accommodate future growth.

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Danny Rushton
ICT Infrastructure Manager,
Wrekin Housing Group

Danny Rushton, ICT Infrastructure Manager, Wrekin Housing Group, understood that the best way forward would be to deploy an off-site backup platform to one of the groups’ other office locations. However, coping with the large data volumes across a wide area network (WAN) would be both unworkable and uneconomic.

With these factors in mind, NetApp’s Partner Nowcomm introduced the converged FlexPod solution as a suitable technology platform. Knowing a FlexPod platform would fit right in because it would enable the trust to meet its immediate business continuity needs while also providing an extensive raft of further benefits.

The Solution

FlexPod is a true data center converged solution. Including Cisco UCS virtualised servers, Cisco Nexus fabric switches, NetApp® FAS virtualised storage, and VMware, FlexPod delivers an integrated system that is prevalidated for a wide variety of workloads. Danny Rushton said: “They [Cisco UCS servers] have been ultra-reliable for us; I’ve never seen them miss a beat in the last two years.”

This configuration allows the trust to take full advantage of NetApp Data ONTAP® intelligent storage software capabilities, vital to enabling the off-site backup plan.

NetApp’s FAS virtualized storage system guarantees to save 50% of disk space over nonvirtualized solutions. It saves this space through a variety of smart features, including compression, thin provisioning, and block-level deduplication, which is essential in virtual server environments, where many machines can be almost identical.

When combined with the ability to take Snapshot® incremental backups in seconds and thin replication, the amount of data needing to be sent to an off-site backup location is dramatically reduced. Importantly, the incremental backups are managed by the storage system and not the application servers to avoid service degradation. This ability to reduce data volumes across a WAN met the trust’s objectives of delivering economical and robust data recovery.

Business Benefits

Robust and reliable business continuity

By moving to the converged FlexPod platform, the trust has met its objectives of gaining a robust and reliable business continuity operation that not only meets current needs but also is future-proofed. The NetApp data deduplication and Snapshot features were instrumental to meeting these objectives.

Rushton says, “We looked at a few different vendors for our storage solution, but NetApp really stood out as being the best of the bunch insofar as its deduplication technology was above and beyond those other vendors that we saw.”

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Server virtualization

By moving to the Nowcomm FlexPod system, the trust was also able to take advantage of server virtualization technology and consolidate its server estate from 50 individual servers to just 5 Cisco UCS machines optimized for a VMware virtual server environment. The trust already had experience with Cisco UCS servers, which ran the trust’s unified communications and call center applications and had proved to be exceptionally reliable.

Low costs, low latency

The trust has not only future-proofed its data center but also at the same time significantly reduced power, cooling, space, and hardware maintenance requirements. “We were quite bowled over with the cost-saving implications of going virtual,” adds Rushton.

Furthermore, the inclusion of flash-based storage within the NetApp FAS8020 controller also improves user experiences by making sure of the delivery of low-latency data to high-performance, delay-sensitive applications.

Improved management

The IT department has also benefited and is now able to manage all storage and server resources from a common centralized point. The NetApp SnapManager® suite has delivered improvements in backup and recovery of Microsoft applications such as SQL Server and Exchange, and administrators are now able to simply restore single mailboxes or even single messages if required.

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

FlexPod platform

Partner

Nowcomm

<http://www.nowcomm.co.uk/>



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