



THE PERFECT RECOVERY SHOT

Golfbreaks.com was launched in April 1999 and is now widely recognised as Europe's largest golf travel company, providing golf breaks, holidays and tours to over 850 venues across the UK, Europe and the rest of the world. With no retail outlets, the company is heavily reliant on its two websites: Golfbreaks.com, and sister site Teeofftimes.co.uk, for generating the majority of its business. The company has around 80 employees, 30 customer facing, who receive inquiries via phone, email and web and process bookings. All of these are completely dependent on IT systems.

The Challenge

As a small, rapidly growing business, Golfbreaks.com was faced with significant challenges in terms of delivering IT services to support the expanding operation. In order to keep hardware acquisition costs to a minimum, the IT team started to deploy multiple applications on each piece of server hardware. The IT team quickly became aware of potential problems with its overpopulated machines, particularly in terms of the downtime which the business would suffer if a server was offline for maintenance work or due to a hardware failure.

The Solution

When Gary Smith, IT Director at Golfbreaks.com, decided that server virtualisation would be a more effective way of delivering IT services to the business, they began to implement VMware vSphere. Working with technology partner Softcat, the company has now deployed 20+ virtual machines on three HP hosts which are connected to a HP SAN providing around 3TB of shared storage.

Golfbreaks.com has also developed a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) solution for a subset of its sales force, and the next step is to deliver a richer desktop experience to their mobile users. The company hosts 15 Windows virtual machines within its virtual infrastructure which the team access via Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP). With Golfbreaks.com reliant on applications supported by its virtual infrastructure, Smith and his team were aware that a new approach to disaster recovery was required to protect the business against prolonged periods of downtime.

"We had found VMware Infrastructure to be a very flexible and robust platform, so much so that our implementation had grown rapidly," said Smith. "We needed a backup and restore solution which wouldn't require a great deal of intervention on our part, but would automate the backup procedure and give us a straightforward way of restoring virtual machines."

Golfbreaks.com looked at a number of different backup and restore solutions and strategies, but one major stumbling point with many of the products on the market was cost. "Many of the backup products we looked at treated virtual machines no differently to physical machines, so we would have required a license for each virtual machine. One of the things which initially attracted us to Vizioncore's vRanger Pro product was that it only required a licence per physical socket on the host machine, which translated into potentially significant savings."

The Benefits

The decision was taken to implement vRanger Pro. "As a small business price-point was important in our selection process, but we still wanted a solution which was robust and easy to use. What impressed us about vRanger Pro was that it gave us a full-image backup of each virtual machine, meaning we could recover the entire machine, including the operating system and all the configurations. Also, we are not Linux people, so we like the fact that vRanger Pro automates many of the procedures we would otherwise have to try and script in the command line."

vRanger Pro is now set up to run automated, full image backups of all the organisation's virtual machines, including its virtual desktop environments. The backup files are sent over the network and stored on the SAN from which they can be rapidly restored in the event of a failure. To further bolster its DR strategy, the virtual machine backup images are copied from the SAN to tapes, which are then taken offsite and stored securely.

As part of its virtualisation strategy, vRanger Pro now plays a key role in helping the IT team at Golfbreaks.com provide a higher level of service to the business. The organisation has a DR strategy in place which is quicker, more easily repeatable and more cost effective than its previous approach to protecting its applications. A number of the virtual machines being covered by this approach are running application servers and databases which support the company's two websites – both of which are absolutely critical to the business.

"For smaller businesses like ours, disaster recovery is absolutely vital, but not always affordable," said Smith. "Having implemented server virtualisation, vRanger Pro has given us a reliable and cost effective way of getting consistent image-level backups of virtual machines. In the event of a serious failure these backup images can be restored into our production environment in as little as 30 minutes, which is much more in line with the recovery times demanded by our business than the two days it might have taken us to rebuild a physical machine."

"Also, because we have implemented VDI, we now have a disaster recovery strategy for our desktop environments," said Smith. "vRanger Pro handles virtual machines running server environments no differently to those supporting desktop environments, so we can backup and restore our teams' virtual desktops in exactly the same way we do our other machines."

Smith recommends virtualisation as the platform of choice for companies looking to improve disaster recovery capabilities, "We have a few physical servers hosted in a co-location site and these systems went down. For whatever reason we weren't able to get in contact with the hosting company in order to restart these services and ended up suffering a couple of days downtime. This simply would not have been an issue if these servers had been virtualised – we would just have restarted them in our virtual infrastructure. Ultimately this is why I think our company will end up going completely down the virtualisation path."

Key Facts

- Formed in 1998 the business is focussed on making golf breaks as simple as possible
- Europe's largest golf travel company, with access to over 950 venues across the UK, Europe

Critical Success Factors

- Keep hardware dependency to a minimum
- Improve resilience to outages and potential disaster

Solution Highlights

- VMware vSphere server virtualisation
- VMware View desktop virtualisation
- Cutting-edge next generation HP server and storage technology
- Vizioncore automated backup and restore for virtual environments

At a Glance

- Ability to dynamically move workloads across the environment
- Significantly less hardware required

- Full imaging of every virtual machine across the desktop and server estate
- Ability to restore every component of a VM in the event of an outage