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Case Study

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Keeping Track Of Email

Sonasoftware Helps Napa County School System Stay On Top Of Email Archival & Backups

Sonasoftware® The Napa County Office of Education, or NCOE, had been looking for an effective solution for archiving email for some time. However, unlike medical and financial industries, the NCOE does not have specific regulations and rules on archiving email.

“There is no agency that sets guidelines for us to follow, so we have to do our best to archive email and follow everyone else’s rules because we don’t know what we’ll find in a court situation,” says Brian Dake, director of information technologies at the NCOE (www.ncoe.k12.ca.us). Although Dake says that later this year the NCOE may get some substantive guidelines about how long emails need to be archived and how they are to be accessed, right now, these issues are up to individual interpretation.

Dake says cases against the NCOE have taken place where plaintiffs were awarded on whether the NCOE had the appropriate emails and then archived and presented them correctly in court. Because of the risk of incurring punitive damages, not to mention e-discovery and court requests, the NCOE needed a concise system that records all incoming and outgoing email, provides easy retrieval for e-discovery purposes, and ultimately limits liability.

Although the NCOE researched other solutions, Dake says his office finally chose two solutions from Sonasoftware (www.sonasoftware.com): SonaSafe for Email Archiving as its email archiving solution and SonaSafe for Exchange Server as the backup and failover solution for its Microsoft Exchange server.

■ Performance At The Right Price

Sonasoftware offered the NCOE the best price plan of the available solutions, an important consideration given that taxpayer money funded its purchase. But price alone would not have been a sufficient reason to choose a solution. “They still have to be good products [that] do the job. We can’t go to court and say, ‘Well, your honor, we couldn’t really afford good software for this request,’ so you have to have good, reliable, affordable software,” Dake says, and Sonasoftware did just that.

SonaSafe provides the NCOE with an all-in-one solution for backup, high availability, disaster recovery, and automatic failover email backup and archival needs. Moreover, SonaSafe just works, according to Dake. “It just functions. That’s the best thing I can say,” Dake says. “That’s important being a small shop. We don’t have time to tinker with things. We go from one issue to

the next, and it's just a lot to take care of, so having a product that works is just incredible.”

SonaSafe's automation capabilities play a huge role in its ease of use. Rather than just performing a daily backup, SonaSafe will take off Exchange's log hourly so that if the NCOE's Exchange server were to crash, its backup would remain current. In addition, SonaSafe provides total capture and archival of users' complete Outlook mailboxes, including messages, calendars, events, and tasks. Sonasoft's solution then makes the archived file easy to search and access. Dake says that he has been able to access mailboxes from employees who left the NCOE back in 2002 using SonaSafe's email archiving solution. “It's been really helpful to archive and move those [mailboxes] off the system so they're not taking up space in our Exchange databases,” says Dake.

Dake says that Sonasoft's tech support staff has helped the NCOE leverage SonaSafe's features. In one case, the NCOE's new director of finance needed an exact replica of his predecessor's mailbox because he needed access to calendar events, along with old correspondence. Sonasoft's tech support showed Dake tricks to create this replica using SonaSafe. “That solved a huge problem for me because the mailbox was something like 8GB in size,” says Dake.

■ Responsive Problem-Solving

According to Dake, Sonasoft is quick to respond with creative solutions to user issues. “You normally don't find this kind of help. At least I haven't, and I've been doing [IT] for 20 years,” Dake says. Dake is especially impressed by the ways in which Sonasoft encourages experimentation and is receptive to customer input when developing new features.

For example, the NCOE needed multi-domain support. Although the NCOE has very few users on its ancillary domains, they do exist and have mailboxes that need to find a way into the NCOE's Exchange archives. According to Dake, this type of support wasn't available even in many of the more expensive competing products that the NCOE considered. “Sonasoft has implemented multidomain support in a slick and painless way,” says Dake. “Again, it's one of those things that just works.”

Additionally, Dake says implementing SonaSafe went well. “I wish I were an Exchange expert, but I can't afford to hire a position of Exchange expert or database administrator,” Dake says. As such, he appreciated Sonasoft's ability to integrate the archiving process seamlessly into a complex Exchange environment.

■ Noteworthy Tech Support

Dake calls Sonasoft's tech support incredible. “I've never waited more than just a few moments, and I always get the level of expertise I need. Often with other vendors, if there's a complicated problem, you may have to wait days for a developer or high-level engineer [to] address a situation. I know these situations are rare, but when you need that type of attention, you need it now,” he says.

Sonasoft has come through for Dake and the NCOE even when the problem had nothing to do with Sonasoft's products. Dake says his office's Exchange server kept rebooting periodically, causing a panic situation. According to Dake, Sonasoft brought in one of its specialists to diagnose and fix the problem, which turned out to be a conflict with the NCOE's antivirus application.

“They knew it wasn't their issue, but they were willing to help us because we were a customer, and it was not working right and [we] didn't have the expertise available to diagnose it,” Dake says.

Of course, Sonasoft's response demonstrates the company's understanding that happy customers typically stay loyal customers and are therefore more likely to purchase its other products. Dake says that originally, the NCOE was going to purchase only the SonaSafe email archiving solution and eventually add SonaSafe Exchange backup software. But once the NCOE's Exchange hardware started to malfunction because of its antivirus conflicts—and it lost a couple of drives in the process—Dake became increasingly concerned about the security of his Exchange data.

"I approached [Sonasoft] about helping me get the sort of backup program in place so that I could be comfortable that my data was secure, and technical support got it up, got it working, and got it configured for me, and I appreciated this because [Sonasoft] helped rescue us in what we thought was going to be a disastrous situation," Dake says. ■

by Robyn Weisman

Sonasoft SonaSafe

Provides scalable and integrated archiving, backup, disaster recovery, and high availability. Uses SIS (single-instance storage) to secure all internal, outgoing, and incoming emails and archive them for easy retrieval. Provides remote management capabilities and reporting capabilities, among other features.

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