



COMPELLENT HELPS FRONTLINE INSURANCE PREPARE TO WEATHER FUTURE STORMS



Since its inception in 1998, Florida's Frontline Insurance Managers has experienced tremendous growth. Today, Frontline is a leader in the home insurance industry. The company, which serves the owners of high-end coastal homes, has dramatically increased its customer base, in part because of its reputation for providing superior service throughout the

claims process. Several years of above-average storm activity in the area have given Frontline many opportunities to demonstrate that service to its customers.

To support the continued growth of the company's primarily web-based business, Kurt Bonigut, Frontline's chief technology officer, recognized the need for a highly scalable, easy to manage data storage solution. "We lacked a single, centralized storage solution," says Bonigut. "As a result, our IT group spent a lot of time on administration when we could have focused on more innovative projects. We needed a cohesive storage strategy to give us both scalability and simplified administration."

At the same time, the IT group wanted to ensure business continuity and improve system uptime. "We can't let a faulty disk drive or server failures interrupt our business," says Bonigut. "But we also need to be prepared for larger-scale problems, such as hurricanes. If it takes us days to recover from a storm, the impact to our business could be dramatic. We needed a storage solution that would help us ensure high availability so we can provide immediate support for our agents and customers."

INTEGRATED SOLUTION SIMPLIFIES STORAGE MANAGEMENT

After evaluating solutions from other vendors, the Frontline IT group selected the Compellent® Storage Center™ storage area network (SAN). Compellent's Data Progression™ software provides Automated Tiered Storage by moving data between tiers based on usage.

"We don't need to store all of our data on expensive Fibre Channel drives, and the addition of SATA drives gives us a high-performance, high-capacity storage system without the high costs of a Fibre Channel-only solution," says Bonigut.

For the Frontline IT group, the Compellent SAN stood out from the crowd in terms of offering a single, integrated storage solution. "None of the other competing vendors could provide the same level of integration. Managing a bunch of poorly integrated applications



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KURT BONIGUT
Chief Technology Officer
Frontline Insurance Managers

RESULTS REPORTED BY FRONTLINE

- » Single, integrated solution simplifies storage administration and enables IT staff to focus on innovative business processes
- » Automated Tiered Storage provides cost-effective utilization
- » Continuous Snapshots and Boot from SAN reduce downtime from hours to minutes for critical applications
- » Integration with Virtual Iron software creates a virtualized data center to maximize flexibility and reliability while minimizing hardware costs

OPERATING SYSTEMS

- » Windows Server 2003
- » Linux

KEY APPLICATIONS

- » Virtual Iron
- » MS Exchange
- » MS SQL Server
- » Oracle
- » Image Now
- » Seagull

POWERFUL VIRTUALIZATION

The Frontline IT group selected Virtual Iron software to implement a cost-effective virtualized server environment that would work seamlessly with the Compellent SAN. Virtual Iron software enables companies to run multiple applications on a single physical server to minimize hardware costs while also enhancing provisioning, capacity management and testing capabilities. Paired together, Virtual Iron and Compellent create a data center environment that lets companies realize the full benefits of virtualization.

“We wanted to virtualize our blade servers, and after doing some research, we found that using Virtual Iron software in conjunction with the Compellent SAN would be a solid combination. It just made sense to use this approach. It allowed us to reduce our physical footprint and create a nimble IT environment that can take full advantage of virtualization.”

KURT BONIGUT
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is too much work,” says Bonigut. “Compellent created its SAN from the ground up and developed its software specifically for this system. The Compellent SAN is an integrated, best-of-breed offering at a price point that other vendors cannot touch.”

The system’s level of integration helps simplify management. “We can manage all of our storage tasks easily through a centralized administrative console. We didn’t need to hire more people or acquire new skills,” says Bonigut. “The ease of management has freed our staff to work on other projects. The Compellent SAN has also eliminated a lot of worry time—we no longer have to worry about storage management or data protection.”

CONTINUOUS SNAPSHOTS AND BOOT FROM SAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE SYSTEM UPTIME

Compellent’s integrated boot from SAN functionality enables seamless recovery of critical applications. According to Bonigut, boot from SAN was a primary reason for selecting the Compellent. If one of Frontline’s blade servers fails, he can boot up a standby, from the SAN and bring the application back online in about 15 minutes. Previously, it might have taken hours or days.

“Our business is largely Web-based, so we depend on the availability of our applications,” says Bonigut. With the Compellent SAN, we can achieve the high availability we need to keep our business operational.”

The Frontline IT group employs continuous snapshots to enhance its data backup and recovery strategy. “Compellent’s snapshot feature augments our existing disk-based backup solution. Now we can create space-efficient Replays every 15 minutes. If there is a problem, we can recover to a Replay and maintain high uptime,” says Bonigut. “Replays also help us test new software patches and updates. We take a snapshot before updating. If there’s a problem with the update, we can immediately roll to the previous state.”

DATA CENTER VIRTUALIZATION CREATES RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

To create a cost-effective and easy to manage data protection strategy that fully leverages boot from SAN and Replays, Bonigut relies on the powerful combination of Virtual Iron and Compellent. “The Virtual Iron software allows us to take full advantage of Compellent’s boot from SAN and Replays to provide a simple, failsafe environment for rapid recovery of critical systems,” comments Bonigut. “We like the approach of not having to manage virtual server disk files and also being able to leverage the Compellent SAN’s unmatched snapshot and replication technologies. Virtual Iron allowed us to do this simply and seamlessly in our current environment.”

Consolidating servers and storage into a virtual infrastructure reduced the footprint required to house Frontline’s data, an important consideration given the expense of a co-located facility. In addition, the Frontline IT team found the combination of Compellent and Virtual Iron logically simpler to manage.

“Managing a virtual pool of storage and servers just made our jobs easier,” says Bonigut. “Using Compellent and Virtual Iron together is a huge time savings. Converting from physical to virtual servers is as simple as managing raw disk. We can manage everything through Compellent, without adding another layer on top.”

Ultimately, the Compellent SAN is helping Frontline achieve a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace. “You need a robust IT infrastructure to effectively respond to your customers when they need you most,” says Bonigut. “The Compellent SAN simplifies storage management, gives us the scalability for future growth and enables us to enhance our uptime so we can respond to crises when they arise. With the Compellent SAN, we’re in a much better position to support our agents and our customers, whatever the weather.”