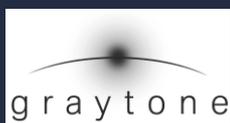


Case Study

Client: Graytone



Overview

Location
UK

Industry
Professional Services

Organization Size
Medium (50 - 999 employees)

Website
www.graytone.co.uk

Solution Overview
Product and Services
Microsoft Azure
Microsoft Dynamics AX
Microsoft Dynamics CRM
Microsoft Hyper-V
Microsoft SQL Server
Windows Server

Aerospace Supplier Protects Business in Face of Disasters with Cloud-Based Replication by Microsoft

As a distributor of paints, sealants, and repair services to aerospace companies, Graytone is an important link in the aircraft refurbishing supply chain. The company uses Microsoft Azure Site Recovery (ASR) to ensure that its business-critical IT systems are always available so that it can serve customers even if its datacenters are disabled. With ASR, Graytone has gained a level of disaster protection that otherwise would have been cost prohibitive.

Business Needs

When airlines and operators of small jet fleets pull an airplane out of service for repainting, repair, and refurbishing, every minute counts. An airplane on the ground makes no money. For Graytone, every minute of downtime counts as well, because it supports a family of companies that serves the aerospace industry.

Two years ago, when a United Kingdom (UK) snowstorm caused a power outage that disabled one of its email servers, Graytone discovered just how important it is to defend its IT systems against weather and other unforeseen incidents.

“Fortunately, the server went down over the Christmas holidays when business was slow, because it took us a week to get email going again,” says Tony Swayne, Finance Director at Graytone. “If that happened today, we wouldn’t survive.”

Graytone is a UK-based holding company for a family of companies that sells and distributes paint, sealants, and other products to the aerospace industry. The companies also provide the industry with maintenance, repair, and overhaul services. Graytone delivers IT, financial, human resources, and business development services for all of the companies in the group. It is based in Haslemere, England, and employs 63 people.

After the snow scare in 2013, the company brought in IT consultant Colin Sargeant to oversee the modernization of its IT infrastructure. Graytone partnered with Sol-Tec, its longtime IT provider and member of the Microsoft Partner Network, to overhaul the company’s technology from desktop to datacenter.



Quote

“I go home at night and sleep well knowing that our business can continue to operate no matter what happens in the world around us. That means an awful lot to us.”

Tony Swayne
Finance Director

Graytone upgraded its desktops to the Windows 7 operating system, replaced its on-premises Microsoft Exchange Server system with Microsoft Office 365, deployed Microsoft Dynamics AX as its enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, implemented Microsoft SQL Server 2014 database software as the ERP system’s database, and rolled out Microsoft Dynamics CRM as its customer relationship management system. It also purchased new servers running the Windows Server 2012 R2 operating system and used the Hyper-V technology in that software to create virtual servers within the physical host servers.

By doing so, the company multiplied its server count without expanding its server footprint. There remained the issue of how to ensure that this spiffy new infrastructure remained up and running at all times. Sol-Tec made daily backups of critical data to Microsoft Azure, the Microsoft cloud platform for building, deploying, and managing applications in Microsoft datacenters. But if there had been a catastrophic disaster in the region that disabled one of the two Graytone datacenters, it would have taken days to rebuild the company’s Dynamics AX and Dynamics CRM systems from tape.

“If our IT systems went down for days, our customers would be sympathetic, but ultimately they would take their business elsewhere,” Swayne says. Even when Graytone has product readily available, it cannot move that product without issuing a government-required certificate of conformity. The certificate documents where and when the product was manufactured and confirms that it meets required specifications. Without functioning IT systems, Graytone cannot produce these certificates.

“Apart from the certificates, we provide all IT services to our family companies, so we have to keep our systems running around the clock to support them,” Swayne says. “Business continuity is a growing concern for our customers. It’s at the top of the list for everyone who serves this industry.” In fact, Graytone had just landed a big contract with a large airline that required it to guarantee 24-hour operation. Graytone had to quickly get a disaster recovery (DR) solution in place.

Sol-Tec introduced Graytone to a new Azure service called Microsoft Azure Site Recovery.

(ASR), a cloud-based DR orchestration service that coordinates the replication and recovery of virtual machines across sites and that can use Azure as a recovery site. Sol-Tec used ASR to replicate the contents of about 10 of 30 Graytone servers—those running Dynamics AX and Dynamics CRM, file and print servers, and domain controllers—to Azure, where they run in warm standby mode. Data from the production ERP servers is replicated to Azure every 15 minutes, and file servers are replicated every hour. In the event of a disaster at one of its two datacenters, Graytone can activate its standby Azure site within 45 minutes and run its business from Azure indefinitely. Soon, Graytone will expand ASR protection to 75 percent of its servers by protecting virtual machines in a second office.

“With Azure Site Recovery, we can protect our business from disasters,” Swayne says. “We were able to quickly fulfill that big contract’s requirements, and we can pursue others that require a robust backup and DR plan. Our sophisticated recovery setup will help us step ahead of our competition in the event of a disaster. I go home at night and sleep well knowing that our business can continue to operate no matter what happens in the world around us. That means an awful lot to us. In this day of hyper-competitive markets, if you’re down for three or four days, you’re out of business.”

Graytone would not have been able to afford to build or co-locate a separate DR site. “We were looking at spending £8,000 [US\$11,800] annually on colocation hosting costs, and that was just the cost of the servers, which would need to be replaced every three years,” Swayne says. “ASR is far more affordable.” Sargeant echoes this sentiment. “I’ve worked with small and midsize businesses for 15 years, and the one thing that’s always been out of reach budget-wise is decent DR,” Sargeant says. “I consider ASR a cost-effective offering and of massive benefit to those businesses.”

Following its success with ASR, Graytone is eager to take advantage of other Microsoft cloud services. The company is moving all files into Microsoft OneDrive for Business, the Office 365 file storage service, and it will move its Dynamics AX test and development environment to Azure, where the environment will be easy to scale up and down depending on development needs. “We get a lot of flexibility and savings with Microsoft cloud services, and we’re eager to put them to greater use on behalf of the business,” Swayne says.

Microsoft Partner

Gold Hosting
Gold Cloud Platform
Silver Cloud Productivity



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