



An Interview with Charles Hornung, Director of IT at New Star Asset Management'

Founded in the year 2000 New Star Asset Management has established itself as one of the leading brands in retail fund management in the UK and are now a significant manager of institutional funds and alternative investments.

Primarily New Star attempts to provide its investors with superior investment returns across a broad range of asset classes, such as equities and bonds to more specialist areas such as property.

New Star Asset Management has grown at a phenomenal rate since its establishment, and its growing reliance on ICT systems to manage its business means that it needs to achieve as close to zero down-time as possible.



Interview with Charles Hornung – Director of IT – New Star Asset Management

Interview

Describe your solution before you had an immediate recovery of your Exchange servers in place?

We have always had a planned recovery of our Exchange servers in place. Even before 9/11 we were acutely aware of the vulnerability of our servers and our data. It has been important from the beginning for us to plan and recover our data and our servers. The initial solution that we had over two years ago consisted of a basic backup to a disaster recovery site. Although the backup was there, we knew that the time to recover our users back to full normality would be around 2 days.

What prompted you to look for a more immediate recovery for your servers?

The full impact of this delay was realised in 2004 when all of the servers in the New Star Asset Management data centre went down, and the full restoration of email took 48 hours.

It was around two years ago that we had a security breach in our main IT centre resulting in the loss of most of our servers. I was in Hong Kong and tried to access my emails, but found that I couldn't get on to the London servers. It was 4am in London and I contacted one of our IT Managers, who, to his credit came in at 5am and ascertained the enormity of the problem – 86 of our hard disks had gone missing. He called out the relevant key staff and the Fund Management systems were running from our disaster recovery site by 9am, as planned.

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"just as important (as email) were the diaries and contact information"

"our staff would be greatly inconvenienced by the e-mail systems being out of action for two days"

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"the beauty of the solution is that users are automatically migrated to the backup servers enabling them to reconnect without any reconfiguration"

"The solution worked better than we had expected... the solution worked so well that we decided not to have the local backup"

"We have implemented an N+1 solution where our Dublin and Bermuda servers both failover to our DR site in London"

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It soon became apparent that the staff would be greatly inconvenienced by the email systems being out of action for two days and that they would not be able to access their emails, diaries or calendars.

We knew that it would take up to two days to rebuild the email servers and restore all the data and two days later all email systems were fully recovered.

What did you learn from this experience?

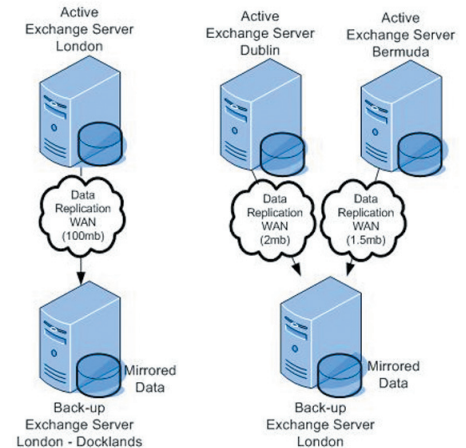
We learned quite a lot. We learned that the solution we had was not good enough for the business need. We also discovered that although we knew that emails were important, just as important were the diaries and contact information that was stored on our Exchange servers. Our staff cannot do without their diaries and contact information. The dilemma was that New Star was expanding very quickly but weren't able to invest in a very expensive solution at the time.

Which solutions did you look at?

We looked at many solutions from complete data archiving and recovery to the MS Clustering and evaluated other solutions in the marketplace.

Why did you choose LifeKeeper?

We chose LifeKeeper because it is best of breed at that price. This was clear from our testing of the other solutions in the market.



Describe your disaster recovery plan as it is today?

Today, we use Sungard to provide our disaster recovery premises. If, for some reason, we cannot get access to our building, we use the centre at Paris Gardens, from there; we can access our servers in our main offices through a high speed link. If there is a disaster and we are unable to access the servers in our main offices, then we have backup servers at the London Technology Centre. We used Open Minds initially to assist us in putting LifeKeeper on our head office and DR servers. We wanted the solution to go in smoothly so we decided to have the specialist expertise of Open Minds to help us put the software in and to train our staff. Now, our internal staff can maintain the servers and the software so we are self-sufficient.

In the event of a disaster, we have set up the servers so that they will failover to our DR centre. Our recovery time is a few minutes. The beauty of the solution is that users are automatically migrated to the backup servers enabling them to reconnect without any reconfiguration.

Describe how you went from the solution you had 2 years ago to the one you have today?

We worked with Open Minds throughout this time and chose a staged rollout of our Exchange servers. We were replacing our old Exchange server with new hardware so we started off by setting up a high-availability server locally. This was a LifeKeeper Exchange cluster with two nodes over a LAN. When we were happy with this environment, we migrated our users over a period of time to the new cluster. Tested it again and when we were confident that this would work, we relocated the backup server to the DR site.

Following the relocation, we did a full DR test where we disabled access to the main site including network and telephone connections etc. All users went to the DR site, the backup exchange servers at dr site were bought into service and users continued their normal operations.



Did it work as you had expected?

In fact, the solution was better than we had expected. We had planned a local backup and a remote backup at the DR site. But the solution worked so well, we decided not to have the local backup.

Have you added any other sites to this initial solution?

Since then, we have implemented an N+1 solution where our Dublin and Bermuda Exchange servers both failover to our head office site in London.

How many users do you have for each of these?

320 in London including 60 fund managers, 10 in Dublin and 5 in Bermuda.

What do you think about LifeKeeper now that you have had it for a couple of years?

My general impression is that it is good and it actually works. I'm a practical person and I make people pull out the wires. They don't like to, but that way I know that it works. I'm very happy with the product, we've tested it in a disaster test scenario, we have done DR tests and seen it work. I have been very satisfied with the results.

How often do you test your DR systems?

We do a DR test three times a year and once every year we do a full user test where users are asked to work from a separate location.

The Future

What about the future – how do you see the solution developing?

We are looking at protecting our Biztalk servers and incorporating our Hong Kong office into the cluster. We now know that LifeKeeper can protect any application so will look at it first for any other clustering requirements we have. We are also looking at adding data archiving to our LifeKeeper servers.

About Open Minds

Open Minds provide software solutions, support, consultancy and training for High Availability, and Disaster Recovery solutions for IT systems. A strong team of technical consultants offer experience gained from many years of successfully installing and supporting LifeKeeper solutions throughout the world in order to implement effective and easily maintained High Availability Solutions.

Open Minds is the registered SteelEye competence centre for the United Kingdom and Ireland. We have longstanding partnerships with VAR's, Software Houses and Systems Integrators to provide a full technical backup including pre-sales, installation services and support required to fully implement a high-availability solution.

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