



Case Study

Fixing growth pains

URS

OUR FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

With the right tools, data mountains become management molehills.



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Shane Primrose, Asia Pacific IT Manager, URS

Exploding corporate data is a fact of business life. In the land of digital files everything just gets bigger, which is often problematic for the people and systems tasked with managing data growth.

Finding available capacity gets harder, and managing data so its creators can retrieve files when they’re needed demands new processes and file management automation. Today’s data management architecture must streamline primary data and improve access to historical data held on different storage media.

Getting there requires a solutions approach – combining hardware, software, policies and processes. And, as multidisciplinary engineering consultancy URS discovered, it also requires a technology integrator with specialist knowledge and a real grasp of solutions provision. When the call came, Lexel Systems Ltd. delivered.

Challenge – data growth and more growth

URS's data growth pains can be seen in many organisations and mostly stem from hungrier applications generating richer files. In the case of the engineering consultancy, CAD drawings were the biggest offenders. Growth had exhausted 2 TB of SCSI-attached primary storage and IT forecasted a requirement for up to 6 TB more over the next three years. But adding more SCSI storage wasn't going to solve the problem and, in fact, was likely to cause more as data pools mushroomed.

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Its Auckland office's 1.2 TB drive shelf was perpetually full, prompting laborious DVD archiving to reduce primary storage volumes. But another problem arose when staff requested old files held in archives, particularly when applications upgrades changed numbering systems. Retrieval was a major investigative task and also duplicated files. What's more, production volumes were so large, full backups could only be attempted over the weekends. URS Asia Pacific IT manager Shane Primrose described the situation as a management nightmare. “IT guys don't have the time for all this – we've got other fires to fight.”

Business IT needs

Primrose wanted a solution that would do the job for five years. The system had to retain documents for necessary time periods, but without encumbering the network or perpetuating management headaches. Critical was automating data migration from primary to secondary and static storage, but keeping all data readily accessible to users.

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In IT terms, this translated to scalable consolidated storage (a large storage array), a backup management mechanism and software to manage data migration. From an ongoing management perspective, Primrose wanted utmost simplicity. “I didn't want to look after hardware or worry about warranty calls or software. I wanted a total solution.”

Solution

URS initially approached Lexel Systems Ltd. for an archiving solution, but broadened the scope to satisfy longer-term objectives.

Today, identical systems run at URS's three ANZ offices. Each comprise a HP EVA storage array, running both standard fibre and fibre channel ATA (FATA) drives, a directly attached file server and LAN-attached server running CommVault backup software, and a tape library.

Lexel Systems Ltd. specified and fully provisioned and tested each system before deployment. Site implementation was completed within a day. Lexel Systems Ltd. also played an instrumental role in architecting ongoing systems care – including an extended five-year warranty, single number support and self-monitoring tools.

Primrose says deploying three identical solutions was a cunning plan, and cheaper. “If ever there is a problem, anyone from the three IT teams can help. It should help to diagnose and fix problems faster.”

Lexel Systems Ltd. provided a ‘one-stop-shop’ solution, overseeing all scoping, development and trans-Tasman site implementation.

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Big Wins

Simple automated management

- Backup software automatically migrates files of a certain age to second tier FATA storage and on to tape archiving.

Seamless user experience

- The procedure fools the operating system into thinking that files exist in their original location, creating a stub that enables users to access the original file.

Room to move

- Running out of disk space used to be a daily occurrence. URS now has scalable capacity forecasted to do the job for five years. “I don't think we'll outgrow it,” says Primrose.

Smaller backups

- The multi-tiered storage environment and associated data migration policies have reduced primary storage volumes requiring backup. It's now practical to run full nightly backups.

No more manual archiving or file duplication

- Where once maxed-out primary storage prompted DVD archiving, the task now falls under an automated data management regime, eliminating once necessary IT support and troublesome file duplication. Replacing DVD archiving with a tape library has freed up almost an entire FTE role. "His job has improved significantly," says Primrose.

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DR platform

- With all its data in a single addressable location, URS has the system to support its business continuity planning. A successful dry run has proved it works.

Peace of mind

- A customised warranty and simplified support put URS at ease. "Lexel Systems Ltd. are always there if I need help. They reduce a lot of my running around," says Primrose.

Work with an expert

- The answer for Primrose was working with an integrator possessing domain knowledge and skills. "Ordinarily you tend to choose resellers on the basis of price and service. But the difference is when specialist services are required. You don't want them to sell you something and then disappear – which a lot of them do," says Primrose.

"Lexel Systems Ltd. get in there and won't take no for an answer from vendors – that's the service you want from resellers."



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