NCI Group Moves Away from Tape and Adds Data Capacity with ExaGrid's Disk-Based Backup with Deduplication System

nci GROUP, INC.

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Mark Serres
Backup and Storage
Administrator
NCI Group

Customer Overview

NCI Group is a conglomerate of companies committed to developing, producing and providing superior products and services for the construction industry. NCI's large network of nationally-recognized and regionally-positioned brands align with their three complementary business segments: metal coil coating, metal components and custom metal building systems. Today, NCI products are used throughout the United States contributing to the further development of communities including schools, healthcare facilities and places of worship, along with a wide variety of commercial and industrial businesses and agricultural applications. NCI has over 70 sites across the United States, as well as sites in Canada and Mexico. NCI's headquarters and primary data center are located in Houston, Texas.

Overwhelmed with Tape, NCI Looks for a Better Solution

NCI's IT team is responsible for supporting multiple sites across the US, Mexico, and Canada, and 5,000 to 6,000 end users. Traditionally, NCI has performed backups primarily using tape. As the company continued to grow and expand, however, its tape backups became increasingly cumbersome.

"Basically we were being overwhelmed by tape," said Mark Serres, NCI's backup and storage administrator. "In my inventory alone, I have about 5,200 tapes to manage. We store them off site with a vendor at about 100 tapes a week. It takes a lot of time to manage that many tapes."

ExaGrid Makes Backups Easier to Manage, Adds Scalability

NCI implemented a two-site ExaGrid system, placing a 50TB system at their headquarters in Houston, with a 40TB grid off site for disaster recovery. The ExaGrid system works alongside NCI's existing backup application, Symantec NetBackup™, and has helped ease the management of NCI's backups.

"The ExaGrid system has helped tremendously with the backups we've moved off of tape," said Serres. "For those systems where we're no longer using tape

at all, we are saved from having to make several trips to our data center on a weekly basis. That saves quite a bit of time."

ExaGrid's data deduplication technology stores changes from backup to backup instead of storing full file copies. This unique approach reduces the disk space required by a range of 10:1 to 50:1 or more, delivering unparalleled cost savings and performance. ExaGrid delivers extremely fast backup performance because data is written directly to disk, and data deduplication is performed post-process after the data is stored to reduce data.

As NCI's data grows, the ExaGrid can easily be expanded to handle additional data. ExaGrid's GRID computing software makes the system highly scalable, and when plugged into a switch, different sized configurations can be mixed and matched into a single GRID system with capacities of up to 100TB. Once virtualized, they appear as a single system to the backup server, and load balancing of all data across servers is automatic.

"We liked the scalability," said Serres. "We liked how simple it was to manage. It was basically a simple backup target. We liked the fact that it was modular or grid-style, that you could add capacity and processing – not just capacity. That's very appealing."

EXAGRID™

Easy to Install, Outstanding Customer Support

ExaGrid comes packaged as a turnkey appliance and was designed to be easy to deploy and manage and to deliver maximum uptime with redundant, hot-swappable components.   All components are fully supported by ExaGrid's trained, in-house engineers dedicated to individual accounts.

"This is the first vendor I have ever dealt with that had a support person who was assigned to my account. So whenever I have an issue, I call him directly and he provides whatever support I need," said Serres. "I like that model, as opposed to trying to get whoever is available. The support person already knows our environment, so that saves a lot of time from having to explain what we're doing here."

ExaGrid and NetBackup

Symantec's NetBackup delivers high performance data protection that scales to protect the largest UNIX, Windows, Linux and NetWare environments. With complete protection from remote office to data center to vault, NetBackup offers a single console for all backup and recovery operations.

Organizations using NetBackup can look to ExaGrid as an alternative to tape for nightly backups. ExaGrid sits behind existing backup applications, such as NetBackup, providing faster and more reliable backups and restores. In a network running NetBackup, using ExaGrid in place of a tape backup system is as easy as pointing existing backup jobs at a NAS share on the ExaGrid system. Backup jobs are sent directly from the backup application to the ExaGrid for onsite backup to disk.

Since the initial deployment of ExaGrid, NCI Group has installed ExaGrid's validated support for Symantec Open Storage for NetBackup (OST). This OST capability provides NCI Group with important integration between ExaGrid's appliance and Symantec NetBackup. Specifically, OST allows the ExaGrid appliance to communicate directly with the NetBackup software regarding the status of replicated backup jobs between NCI Group's facilities. By ensuring that the NetBackup media catalog knows about not only the local backup but also the replicated copy, it creates a streamline disaster recovery procedure for NCI Group.

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Intelligent Data Protection

ExaGrid's turnkey disk-based backup system combines high quality SATA drives with byte-level data deduplication, delivering a disk-based solution that is more cost effective than standard SATA drives. ExaGrid's byte-level data deduplication technology stores only the changes from backup to backup instead of storing full file copies, reducing the amount of disk needed by a range of 10:1 to 50:1 or more, resulting in a solution that is 25 to 30% the cost of standard SATA drives. The ExaGrid system is easy to install and use and works seamlessly with popular backup applications, so organizations can retain their investment in existing applications and processes.

ExaGrid servers can be used at primary and secondary sites to supplement or eliminate offsite tapes with live data repositories for disaster recovery.

For more information about ExaGrid, please visit us at www.exagrid.com or call us at 1-800-868-6985.

About ExaGrid Systems, Inc.

Customers worldwide depend on ExaGrid Systems to solve their backup problems–effectively and permanently. ExaGrid's disk-based, scale-out GRID architecture adjusts to increasing backup demands due to constantly growing data volumes. It is the only solution that combines compute with capacity as well as a unique landing zone to permanently shorten backup windows and eliminate expensive forklift upgrades. Learn more at **www.exagrid.com**.

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