

Johnstone Supply of Houston

Customer Snapshot

Name

Johnstone Supply of Houston and Beaumont, TX

Line of Business

Wholesale distribution—HVAC/R parts and equipment

Location

Houston and Beaumont, TX

EVault Product

Activant Eclipse™ Remote Backup powered by EVault SaaS

Configuration

16 Microsoft Windows servers

Capacity

50GB backed up each night

Johnstone Supply of Houston Remotely Protects Critical Activant Eclipse Data with EVault

IT manager Jeff Boggan of Johnstone Supply knew that his existing tape backup processes weren't ideal for protecting the critical business applications that kept the wholesale HVAC distributor's seven offices up and running in Houston and Beaumont, Texas. But the shortcomings of this approach to data protection didn't truly hit home until he began the slow process of recovery from flooding, courtesy of 2001's tropical storm Allison.

The storm's record rainfall and severe flooding in Southeast Texas and the Houston metro area left few low-lying Houston businesses and residences unscathed. Hit especially hard by the three feet of water flooding the company's primary Houston site was its Activant Eclipse™ system, which was used to track everything from the company's extensive HVAC/R equipment and parts inventory, purchasing, and warehouse logistics to customer sales, pricing, and accounting.

"We lost our Eclipse server and all but one of our backup tapes," recounts Boggan, who noted the event became the catalyst for the distributor's overhaul of its disaster recovery processes. "We opened a support request with Eclipse Customer Support in October 2001 for a redundant remote backup system that would work with our server." That request led them to EVault SaaS, a managed off-site data protection service powering the Eclipse Remote Backup offering.

"It's an automated, worry-free solution that just does what we hoped it would."

Bill Patton
Activant Solutions, Inc.

Case Study

Johnstone Supply of Houston

Goals

- Achieve better protection for business-critical Activant Eclipse data
- Establish automated disk-based backup and recovery
- Implement a more reliable, rapid disaster recovery plan
- Remove dependency on others for tape backup

Challenges

- Environmental/disaster risk of Activant Eclipse ERP system data loss
- Backup tape process cumbersome and inefficient
- Nonexistent remote backup/restore process

Goals

According to Activant's Bill Patton, vice president of support and professional services, Johnstone Supply of Houston's reliance on local, tape-based backup was not unique among Eclipse's many customers in the distribution industry, who rely on their systems to fuel the most critical facets of their business. "For many of these organizations, Eclipse is the most important application in their facility. It's their back-office ERP system and is absolutely mission critical," he said, noting, "Frankly, we know many fall short in how they are protecting this data. Even if they take legacy tape backups off-site, it's not a very deep backup process."

Many customers have since begun to reevaluate their backup practices to avoid outcomes like what befell Johnstone Supply with tropical storm Allison. "We're hearing more requirements all the time from our customer base, who want to develop a more robust business continuity and disaster recovery plan for different portions of their business," Patton said.

Johnstone Supply of Houston hoped Eclipse could help them achieve their goals:

- Fully protect the Eclipse business-critical data
- Replace tape with a more reliable, disk-based process
- Automate the company's backup and recovery
- Implement a reliable, rapid disaster recovery plan
- Stop relying on others to perform manual, tape change-out tasks

Challenges

Besides wanting to avoid another post-flood scenario, Boggan sought to remove day-to-day tape backup hassles. Being the only dedicated IT resource supporting Johnstone Supply of Houston's seven branch stores and 47 employees, he wanted an automated system that would eliminate the possibility of someone forgetting to change backup tapes. He also wanted to eliminate mechanical failures of either the tape drives or tapes themselves.

Unfortunately, he was now all-too-aware of the risk of loss or damage to the company's backup tapes, let alone its critical applications and servers. He hoped to find an effective, disk-based backup and recovery solution that would fit their budget.

Solutions

Boggan evaluated a few options before making his decision. "IBM offered a backup facility in Dallas, but it was outside of our budget constraints. We also had a secondary server and backup tape system at one of our remote branch locations," he said. This scenario was also soon discarded. "The server version became obsolete and was not cost-effective to replace compared to EVault."

After hearing about the Eclipse Remote Backup service powered by EVault, several things stood out. "I particularly liked the system's simplicity, low cost and remote backup location," he said.

This view is shared by other Activant Eclipse customers who've since deployed the same data protection backup and recovery online service. "We've had nothing but good experiences with EVault," said Activant's Patton. "EVault shares a similar, 'above and beyond' customer-focused attitude. Their best-of-breed solution provided by industry experts that span multiple industries is a great fit for us and our customers."

The EVault SaaS secure, managed online service now fuels the Eclipse Remote Backup solution. Using this service, Johnstone Supply of Houston has automated its nightly backup of roughly 50GB of Activant Eclipse data each night. Boggan reports his worries

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about tape-based backups and restores vanished when he made the move to nightly backups to a certified secure remote EVault data center.

Making the switch was also a non-issue. “Installation of the Eclipse Remote Backup service was totally seamless. It was all handled by Eclipse technicians, with no impact or downtime experienced by our users,” said Boggan.

Results

Boggan couldn't be happier with the way the system works, and the peace of mind he enjoys. “The Activant Eclipse Remote Backup system [powered by EVault] is cost-effective, non-intrusive and reliable. It gives me daily confirmations by e-mail and requires no additional time or maintenance to use,” he said. “We finally have a reliable, remote, redundant backup and recovery system.

He no longer needs to rely on someone to manually switch out backup tapes, and doesn't miss the need to personally troubleshoot tape-based system failures. “It's just very easy to maintain. If I ever have any issues, they are immediately handled by Activant Eclipse technicians by simply notifying them with a support request.” However, he admits that situation is rare because the backups just plain work.

Activant's Patton notes this is common feedback from customers using Eclipse Remote Backup powered by EVault. “The EVault technology is incredibly efficient. It cuts backup times dramatically and only needs to backup block-level changes to files,” he said. “Restoring files or directories has never been easier for Activant Eclipse customers.”

Patton gives a positive nod to Johnstone Supply of Houston for making the switch to a more effective solution to protect their core systems. “A lot of customers are still self-managing their tape storage. Too few have actually invested in a vaulted, data managed, environmentally-controlled service offering. Johnstone Supply of Houston's experience with Activant Eclipse Remote Backup is an example for others. It's easy to implement and virtually invisible once it's running. It's an automated, worry-free solution that just does what we hoped it would.”

Take the next step

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