

Hitchcock Schools Protects SQL Servers and Data with AppAssure

Background

The Hitchcock Independent School District in Hitchcock, Texas serves 1,200 students in grades K-12 through 4 schools with a new elementary school on the way. The IT group at Hitchcock, led by Chris Armacost, Director of Technology, is responsible for all the end-user devices, network equipment, and servers that support students, teachers, administrators, and the district's Head Start and other special education programs. Central to their mission is protecting student (e.g. grades, reports, plans), business, and course application data that resides on SQL servers. That would be a much bigger worry if it weren't for AppAssure. "I don't spend hours on tape backups and then worry about dirty tapes anymore," says Armacost. "AppAssure takes snapshots every 15 minutes and if a server does go down, we'll just restore it."



"I don't have to worry about a server going down now,"

**– Chris Armacost
Director of Technology,
Hitchcock Schools**

The Old Days: Tapes and Shadow Copy

There are 10 servers running SQL in the Hitchcock Independent School District in Hitchcock, Texas. Those servers and the databases they support contain data for the 1,200 students that attend Hitchcock's elementary, middle, and high schools and Head Start and special education programs. Student data includes course grades, test scores, parent contact information and other pieces information needed by educators. Business data – financial information – is also SQL based. And then there are course applications that require SQL databases and servers.

Protecting that SQL infrastructure and data falls to Chris Armacost, Hitchcock's Director of Technology and two IT staffers who are also responsible for end-user devices and the network.

"We were just doing tape backups at night which isn't 100%," says Chris. "The backup might fail or there might be bad data on the backup. And since it took 9 hours to back up just the D: drives, we weren't backing up the C: drives. That meant that only data, and not applications, were backed up. If a server went down, we had to rebuild the whole thing."

Chris was also using shadow copy (VSS) to take snapshots of data. "That worked but we were limited to 2 snapshots per day because there's no compression. Space limits the number of snapshots you can take and how long you can keep them."



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Finding AppAssure

Chris was introduced to AppAssure through a Microsoft TechNet email. “I saw that AppAssure is Microsoft Gold Certified,” he remembers. “I did my research online and then decided to buy. I’d been using shadow copy and was familiar with that kind of technology.”

Implementation went well with Chris bringing implementing AppAssure on 2 – 3 servers per week. “I went bit by bit to make sure that everything was working o.k.” he reports. He was able to manage the roll-out on his own.

“It was nice that we didn’t have to purchase new server hardware to install AppAssure,” says Chris. “We’re a school district so budget is always a concern. I was able to use old servers after installing new drives and controller cards which all together cost about \$800.”

Protecting SQL, Saving Time, Eliminating Worry

These days, Hitchcock’s SQL servers are protected with AppAssure. Hitchcock has configured AppAssure to take a snapshot of the data and application every 15 minutes so that the entire system can be restored quickly without requiring Chris to rebuild the server.

Rebuilding a server, especially rebuilding one under pressure, is never a fast or fun job. “I don’t have to worry about a server going down now,” says Chris. “We have hot swap so if anything goes down I just flip on a new server and it’s as current as 15 minutes ago.” Along with fast restore, AppAssure gives Hitchcock data reliability assurance by monitoring itself for data corruption. “We don’t have to worry about dirty tapes anymore either.”

Chris was concerned that AppAssure processing might cause network performance issues – he has configured to take snapshots of each of his 15 servers every 15 minutes - but that hasn’t been the case. “We have a 1 Gb backbone and there’s no noticeable hit when snapshots are being taken. I haven’t had one call.”

Chris hasn’t finished taking advantage of AppAssure’s application protection capabilities. He plans to implement AppAssure in Hitchcock’s Exchange environment once his migration is completed and looking at virtualization as a way to make restoration even more seamless.

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