Kennedys
Legal advice in black and white

FalconStor®
S o f t w a r e

"It's now 'business as usual,' but better. We have the infrastructure that we need, and we can focus on improving the applications that we run to make us more productive and more competitive."

— *Ian Lauwerys, IT Director, Kennedys*

Kennedys

FalconStor NSS ensures that the dramas at this international law firm take place in the courtroom, not the data center

Background

Leading law firm Kennedys has doubled in size in the last four years, and boasts offices in numerous locations across the UK, as well as in Spain, United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, Sydney, Singapore, and New Zealand.

In July 2008 the firm amalgamated its three London offices into a single new location in London, close to many of its UK clients. This date was the culmination of a three-year project to entirely revamp the firm's IT infrastructure – including the implementation of new storage services intended to provide comprehensive backup and disaster recovery (DR).

Challenge

The key project driver for Kennedys was the relocation of its data center. The firm only had real-time disaster recovery (DR) capabilities for its primary systems, and the hosted backup service that it was using was becoming increasingly expensive due to growing data volumes.

The challenge facing IT director Ian Lauwerys and his team was to bring the backup function in-house, to improve DR capabilities by – in his words – "an order of magnitude," and to move the whole data center offsite.

"As a law firm, our biggest issue is that 'time is money'," explains Lauwerys. Legal time is billable by the hour, so every hour in which lawyers are unable to earn is time and money lost forever. The initial relocation needed to be achieved without incurring downtime during business hours.

FalconStor Solution

Over the course of a year, Lauwerys and his team talked with a variety of providers about how to achieve its objectives. The aim was to select the best, most cost-effective solution, through a single primary supplier.

Following this long deliberation, Kennedys appointed its long-term partner, Intercept, with a plan to virtualize everything in Kennedys' core system. The motivation behind this decision was cost – not just the cost of data center floor space but, in particular, energy costs. As the scope of the project increased, costs rose substantially. Virtualization – and the related cost savings – was identified as the key to making the entire project pay off over the long term.

Industry

Legal, Business Services

Company Profile

Kennedys is a specialist national and international legal firm. It has more than 650 staff members globally, in eight UK offices and seven international locations. With a particular focus on dispute resolution and litigation, its lawyers provide legal services for many industries including: insurance and reinsurance, healthcare, construction, employment, rail sectors, maritime, and international trade.

IT Environment

> 60 physical servers (reduced to 7 using VMware ESX Server)
> Microsoft SQL Server

Challenges

> Migrating data from in-house data center to new offsite data center without downtime
> Improving DR functionality and coverage
> Reducing the high costs of hosted backup service

FalconStor Solution

> FalconStor® Network Storage Server (NSS)
> FalconStor Snapshot Director for VMware
> FalconStor HyperTrac™ Backup Accelerator

Benefits

> Full range of DR capabilities
> Reduced backup costs
> Cost savings of more than £350k (USD$550,000)
> Easy provisioning of storage to VMware virtual machines
> Infrastructure is now 'application-ready' for new strategic IT initiatives
> Improved backup and data protection through replication
>

The IT team chose the FalconStor® Network Storage Server (NSS) solution for storage virtualization. "The pricing was good; very competitive," Lauwerys begins. "But the key thing that FalconStor did was prove that its solution would do what they said it would. Others couldn't do that."

The partner set about virtualizing Kennedys' servers using VMware ESX Server – a phase which saw the number of physical, production servers reduced from 60 to just seven, with all the attendant savings in floor space, energy, and backup costs. Intercept's objectives included provisioning a stable, virtualized storage platform to VMware, adding a full range of DR features, protecting data with full transactional consistency, and leveraging service-enabled mirroring to migrate data from the in-house data center to an offsite location.

Deployment Details

Using FalconStor NSS, data was quickly and successfully migrated over IP from Kennedys' increasingly unreliable and difficult-to-manage hosted storage, onto new HDS physical storage in the offsite data center. "What we particularly liked was that FalconStor NSS made the management of the physical storage 'not our problem,'" Lauwerys muses. "Provisioning of storage became straightforward using the console, and we could choose whatever storage hardware we wanted. We went with HDS this time, but we have the freedom to choose a different storage vendor in the future if appropriate."

He adds, "We simply replicated our data from the existing storage to the new location at a convenient point in time. FalconStor NSS then kept it synchronized with the old production systems, enabling us to switch over to the new data center one application at a time." As soon as the team worked out the application dependencies as part of the design process for the virtualized solution, the business risks associated with the migration evaporated. "We knew that if something didn't work the first time, we could just carry on working from the existing data center, fix the problem, and try again next time," Lauwerys explains.

All data is now replicated and protected for DR purposes, with different applications on different protection schedules according to their level of importance. "These policies can be changed easily whenever we want to," says Lauwerys. "But the really big deal for us is transactional consistency, particularly for email and Microsoft SQL Server data." The FalconStor Snapshot Director for VMware integrates with FalconStor NSS and VMware ESX Server to enhance VMware snapshot technology, ensuring rapid, reliable recovery of mission-critical data without the need for Kennedys to perform time-consuming bare metal restore or scripting.

There are three FalconStor NSS appliances installed in the Kennedys infrastructure: two in an active-active configuration for high availability (HA) on the primary site, replicating to a single appliance on a DR site. Backup is done in-house at the data center, generating substantial savings over the hosted backup service previously employed. FalconStor HyperTrac™ Backup Accelerator technology automatically initiates and mounts FalconStor TimeMark snapshots when backup jobs are run. Working in conjunction with the company's Symantec NetBackup software, FalconStor HyperTrac increases tape backup speed, eliminates backup windows, and offloads processing from application servers.

As of yet, Kennedys has had no reason to put its DR plans into operation – although Lauwerys and his team undergo regular testing. "We often take the opportunity to test elements of the process as part of our ongoing application upgrade program," he says.

Business Benefits

"The best part of the FalconStor NSS solution is that there is no longer any 'drama,'" says Lauwerys. "We now save the drama for the courtroom instead of the data center." He estimates that the savings from virtualizing the servers and storage alone exceed £350k (USD$550,000) per year. "That enables us to remain cost-effective for our clients while becoming a more profitable business."

He adds, "I can't overstate how important it was to us that the original migration went well. The one thing that we couldn't afford to do was have the bulk of the UK operation going down for any length of time; it just wasn't something we could tolerate and it was something that we didn't have to deal with during an incredibly busy migration schedule."

One year after the migration, Kennedys has added disk arrays to expand its storage capacity. "It's now 'business as usual', but better," says Lauwerys. "We have the infrastructure that we need, and we can focus on improving the applications that we run to make us more productive and more competitive. This makes us, as an IT department, more strategic because we're not worrying about the day-to-day issues any more. We couldn't do that easily before, but now we can try all sorts of things without the risk of breaking anything. We've got the foundation – now we can focus on supporting the business."

For more information, visit www.falconstor.com or contact your local FalconStor representative.

FalconStor®
Software

CD DataHouse
STORAGE SYSTEMS & DATA PROTECTION

CD-DataHouse Ltd | www.cd-datahouse.co.uk | info@cd-datahouse.co.uk | +44 203 287 2075