The Automobile Association, better known as the AA, was founded in 1905 and is the UK’s largest motoring organization, providing roadside assistance for its 15 million members.

Today, the AA’s business stretches in many different directions. Although best known for its breakdown recovery business, the company also provides a range of other services, from car insurance and other financial services to route planning and evaluating secondhand cars.

All of these services are powered by data, which must be securely and efficiently stored for both business continuity and compliance.

**THE CHALLENGE**

Improve business agility and meet compliance regulations while reducing costs

The AA went through a period of massive change, which its existing storage infrastructure was not flexible enough to cope with. E-mail messages were also increasing in volume and size, and the AA had to regularly expand its storage capacity to cope with the incessant growth in corporate data. The mixed bag of storage platforms in the AA’s data center made the infrastructure complicated, with expensive operating costs and heavy manpower.

The AA recognized that it needed to find a more cost effective and efficient means to manage and store its data, while complying with Financial Services Authority requirements.

Dave Snowling, technical architect at the AA, explains: “We were facing spiraling storage costs at a time when organizations were trying to reduce their operational overheads. Storage is not particularly visible within the business, so it was becoming increasingly difficult to justify the expense.”

When sold by its parent company, Centrica, in late 2004, the AA needed to establish its own infrastructure and disaster recovery capability. The company took the opportunity to build a new storage platform that would help reduce costs and create a flexible and scalable environment for future growth. This vision needed to quickly become a reality to make sure that the company had sufficient capacity to cope with the migration of applications and data.

**CUSTOMER PROFILE**

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**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Industry**
  Automotive

- **The challenge**
  Centralize storage to reduce costs, achieve compliance, and provide disaster recovery.

- **The solution**
  NetApp® FAS storage systems and NetApp Snapshot™ technology.

- **Benefits**
  - Accelerated time to market for new applications by up to 50%
  - Reduced manpower to support storage by more than 80%
  - Reduced information recovery time from hours to minutes
  - Reduced operating costs by more than 40%
  - Achieved compliance and disaster recovery goals for continuous data availability

**THE AA Shrinks Operating Costs and Speeds Time to Market with NetApp**
“Our IT operating costs have reduced from $108 million to $64 million. The new storage infrastructure [from NetApp] has been instrumental in helping us achieve these cost savings.”

Darragh O’Keeffe
Infrastructure Strategy Manager, The AA

THE SOLUTION

Centralize storage and standardize on NetApp

Working closely with the IT services firm Company-i, the AA decided on a centralized storage infrastructure, recognizing that it would be cheaper and easier to run than the existing distributed architecture. “We wanted to create a central pool of storage resources which could be grown methodically to meet the needs of the business,” recalls Snowling.

Storage from NetApp had been used in the Centrica data center, so the AA was already familiar with what it could do and how it performed against its competitors. It was an obvious choice for the new IT infrastructure, and for the new outsourced data center.

Company-i helped the AA design, test, and deploy 12 different network-attached storage (NAS) systems to create a robust and flexible storage platform. Today, the NetApp FAS environment provides fully networked primary storage for the AA. The FAS systems hold information from core business applications, including file serving for Oracle® database servers, SAP®, and SAS data mining applications. A cluster of FAS systems also house the Microsoft® Exchange mail servers.

Backup and compliance requirements are met with NetApp NearStore® on FAS.

To maintain the continuous availability of critical information, the AA has split its 200TB NAS estate across two sites, with data being replicated between the two locations. Using NetApp Snapshot technology to back up their 3,000 mailboxes means that messages—or the entire e-mail service—can be rapidly restored at either site in the event of a system outage or disaster.

To help simplify the ongoing management of the storage environment, the AA uses NetApp Operations Manager, a management and monitoring tool that provides a centralized view of storage assets, their capacity, and key performance trends. With this simplified view, only one person is needed to monitor what is happening on all the systems.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Faster time to market, cost savings, and reduced recovery times

Speed was central to the AA’s plans from the start, not only because the company needed to set up its new infrastructure quickly, but also because it wanted to provide better access to internal data. The AA’s storage infrastructure was designed to enable rapid business-critical transactions, resulting in increased staff productivity.

Improved data throughput on the AA’s SAS business intelligence platform alone has opened up new marketing and customer research opportunities that will help drive the business forward.

And this agility is mirrored across the company. Fast access to information enables the AA to respond to market opportunities far more rapidly—time to market for new applications is now up to 50% faster.

Centralizing and standardizing its storage means that the AA has also been able to reduce the staff time required to support the storage infrastructure by more than 80%. Information recovery time has also been cut from several hours to a matter of minutes.

“By simplifying the management of our storage infrastructure, we can provide our customers with better service. We can also respond more quickly to changing business and customer needs,” says Snowling. “The storage environment and the data it stores are critical to the operations of the company—by working with Company-i and NetApp, we have been able to future-proof our infrastructure and maximize our return on investment.”
“Since being sold by Centrica, our IT operating costs have reduced from $108 million to $64 million,” says Darragh O’Keeffe, infrastructure strategy manager at the AA. “The new storage infrastructure has been instrumental in helping us achieve these cost savings.” As well as aiding cost control and efficiency, the storage environment has also had a direct impact on day-to-day business activities. For example, the AA’s publishing team now has better access to the images they need for maps and guidebooks, and the insurance division can commission new systems in less time.

The partnership approach adopted by the AA, Company-i, and NetApp was an important key to the success of the project and the delivery of so many business benefits. As Darragh confirms, “We worked as a single team and focused on getting the job done. This cooperation was pivotal in achieving the project goals.”

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

NetApp Products
NetApp FAS960
NetApp NearStore R200
NetApp Snapshot
NetApp Operations Manager

Environment
Applications: SAP, SAS Software, Oracle Database 9i®, Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SQL Server®
NetApp creates innovative storage and data management solutions that accelerate business breakthroughs and deliver outstanding cost efficiency. Discover our passion for helping companies around the world go further, faster at www.netapp.com.