NEBRASKA
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OFFICE OF THE CIO

STATE OF NEBRASKA | PROBLEM SOLVED

After years of siloed data center approaches, the State of Nebraska simplified its IT infrastructure, saving the state $4.5 million in the first year and making massive service improvements for its citizens.

Fueling Paperless Processes and Faster Service for Citizens

The Nebraska state government's commitment to providing innovative services to citizens led the state to embark on a digital transformation that simplified and modernized its IT infrastructure. With this transformation, the state has saved more than $11.3 million annually and has delivered paperless services to Nebraskans in record time. From hikers who use Nebraska state parks to new mothers who apply for Health and Human Services programs, all citizens are benefitting from the optimized IT environment.

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Health and Human Services, State Patrol, the Department of Revenue, 911, and the DMV are just a few of the numerous state agencies that serve citizens across the state. Data is the common thread, and the ability to move data seamlessly is critical to providing services to citizens efficiently and cost-effectively. From the processing of Medicaid claims to the tracking of 911 calls, data is at the heart of Nebraska's government.

Because of legislation, the state's Enterprise Content Management (ECM) team was asked to build an enterprisewide system for government transparency of all state contracts. The state began rolling out plans to speed services and to cut costs through a paperless strategy. But as officials looked across agency infrastructures, it became clear that disparate IT systems wove a web of complexity that had to be untangled first.

"Each county and agency had its own data closet and differing approaches to backup and disaster recovery. Everything was individually firewalled, so we couldn't see across the data," says Aaron Weaver, IT supervisor, State of

Nebraska. The state also had to contend with unbridled data growth from an expanding population and the use of larger file sizes.

The state's new CIO, Ed Toner, set in motion an ambitious and rapid plan for consolidation. "We needed a unified solution that would help us centralize the IT organization and consolidate our agencies' data," says Toner. "I also wanted two active data centers so that we could have instantaneous failover and disaster recovery."

The team worked with NetApp to build a strategy for consolidating the infrastructure on an all-flash solution with a NetApp MetroCluster™ array spanning the 50 miles from Lincoln to Omaha.

SAVING LIVES WITH INSTANT FAILOVER

Since installing the NetApp all-flash solution, the Nebraska CIO's office has virtualized 90% of its servers. "There was a lot of unstructured data," says Weaver. "Now we can see across the data for insights and trends." The state also implemented a digital archiving strategy to securely archive data and to free up large amounts of storage space.

The capabilities that are built into NetApp ONTAP® software helped alleviate any lingering skepticism from agencies, particularly for backup and recovery challenges. "One team in particular had a 4-day process for backup," says Weaver. "When we showed them how we could create a copy of the data, replicate it, and back it up in just seconds, we could see the relief wash over their faces."

Since deploying a MetroCluster array between Lincoln and Omaha, the state is using its two main data centers more fully. "All of our mission-critical applications are on the MetroCluster array—things like 911 and State Patrol, where lives are at stake," explains Toner. "Now we can ensure uptime." The active-active controllers stretch between the sites, giving the state an optimal solution for disaster recovery. "We can instantly fail over from one site to the other, and we have zero RPO and near-zero RTO," says Toner.

USING ELECTRONIC FILING TO DRAMATICALLY SPEED SERVICES FOR CITIZENS

After the systems had been consolidated, paperless processes could be instituted, and service

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innovations rapidly followed. Health and Human Services is one agency that is seeing dramatic results. That agency launched paperless, client-centered services with its Journey WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program. New electronic processes eliminated 23 paper forms, speeding access to services and decreasing help-desk tickets from clients by 18%. The comprehensive, connected data enables nurses and nutritionists to see across family histories and to receive health prompts, helping them focus discussions and advise clients more effectively.

Nebraska's $12.6 billion cattle industry is also experiencing improvements. Since the 1840s, Nebraska ranchers have relied on brands to identify cattle. The paper-based process that previously took weeks now happens in real time. Nebraska Brand Committee inspectors use iPads to capture photos of brands on the 6.64 million cattle in the state. "The inspectors photograph the brands, register them, and take payment on an iPad," says Toner. "It's all done at the ranch, and the transaction is immediately completed."

The Department of Environmental Quality is another example of an agency migrating to electronic filing and dramatically cutting the time for approvals. "The agency decreased what used to take weeks and months down to days now through electronic filing," says Toner.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The state is continuing to accelerate its paperless goals. "Now, any agency that still uses paper forms goes through a process improvement group that advises on how to automate," says Toner. "Removing the complexity from IT has helped us better serve our citizens. The new capabilities mean that agencies can explore innovations that we hadn't previously imagined."

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