Swinton Insurance underpins a sweeping transformation programme with a NetApp storage Platform

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry
Insurance

The Challenge
Underpin new web-based application and website that handles 250,000 queries a day with new storage platform that would also help drive the business forward and meet business transformation objectives

The Solution
Implement NetApp FAS8000 and NetApp FAS3250

Benefits
- High performing and flexible
- Robust, rigorous, and reliable backups
- Easy day-to-day management
- Ability to analyze larger datasets for business improvement
- Platform to support future growth and expansion

Customer Profile

Swinton Insurance is the UK's largest high street insurance retailer. It has 350 branches, a large call centre and employs over 4,000 people. The company was founded in 1957 by Ken Scowcroft who named it after a borough within Salford, North West England, where he lived. The first policy cost £5 and within the first year about 100 policies were sold to local people.

Scowcroft's goal was to change the way insurance was bought in the UK. In the 1950s, people usually bought motor insurance from salesmen who came to door. Scowcroft believed he could provide a much more competitive offer by comparing prices from different insurance companies to find the best value. Today Swinton has approximately 2.2 million live policies.

Traditionally based around motor vehicle cover it also has a commercial arm, which deals in business insurance across a wide range of areas from office, shop and surgery insurance to farm, hotel and tradesman insurance. It has approximately 70,000 businesses on its books.

The Challenge

Over the past 18 months the company has been undergoing a transformation programme designed to position it for the future. This has involved analysing its product portfolio, its existing customer base and how it sells to customers.

From the IT perspective this has meant extensive work on its line-of-business software. Its bespoke brokerage system was largely based on third-party Linux software which typically required a lot of coding to keep abreast of changing business requirements.

It wanted a much more flexible option and in line with the objectives of the transformation programme the company intended to move to a web-based application. This would provide Swinton advisors with much more flexibility when selling policies and also bring down the amount of time required with customers which was typically an hour.

Given that the success of the transformation programme also hinged on a new retail platform, with approximately 3,000 advisors providing 250,000 quotes a day, a new storage platform was also required. Owen Rawlinson, IT Infrastructure Manager, Swinton Insurance, said: "We have a heavily virtualised environment because of the consolidation benefits it delivers.

"We can respond quickly and effectively to new market dynamics which in a fiercely competitive market is critically important."

Owen Rawlinson
IT Infrastructure Manager
Swinton Insurance

This means we have multiple copies of data so we needed a storage platform that was both resilient and flexible."

"We have used NetApp storage technology for about six years. When we first used NetApp its flexibility was far in advance of what other vendors could offer. Since then there have been continuing advancements made by NetApp such as its clustered Data ONTAP which allows you to easily scale sideways. As a result, we decided to stay with NetApp to underpin our web application."

The Solution
Consequently, Swinton Insurance chose both NetApp FAS8000 and FAS3250 as a foundation for data storage and management.

NetApp FAS8000 is designed for business critical workloads and to adapt quickly to changing business needs while also providing uptime, scalability and cost-efficiency. FAS8000 is essentially a unified scale-out system that boosts throughput and decreases latency in order to deliver consistent application performance across a broad range of network workloads.

Simplified management ensures straightforward deployment in the data centre. Non-disruptive operations are delivered by simplifying long-term

scaling and improving uptime by facilitating repairs, refreshes and other updates without having to plan for downtime.

NetApp FAS3250 is designed to enable efficient management of large amounts of diverse data to consolidate block and file storage. It's also ideal for virtualised environments and given Swinton's preference for virtualisation dovetailed well with the company's need to enable virtual machine mobility and offload workloads for data protection. Management tools such as Snapshot, SnapRestore data recovery software and SnapManager management software also meant Swinton could introduce a robust and rigorous high-availability and disaster recovery strategy.

FAS3250 also uses the same Data ONTAP operating system as FAS8000 enabling Swinton to make data-in-place upgrades to FAS8000 using the same management tools. In short, both FAS8000 and FAS3250 provide performance, efficiency and flexible responsiveness alongside proven TCO enabling Swinton to underpin its business transformation programme with an effective, reliable and flexible storage platform.

Business Benefits
Driving business at the sharp end

The NetApp storage platform enables Swinton to easily and quickly create replicas of its live environment which in turn allows developers to create

code for its web-based application. Owen Rawlinson says: "We can flexibly and easily create multiple copies of data and store virtual databases thanks to NetApp. As a result, it's easier to continually develop our web-based application to meet changing business needs. In short, we can respond quickly and effectively to new market dynamics which in a fiercely competitive market is critically important."

Consistent flexibility drives the business
Given that Swinton Insurance has 350 retail sites data backup was a big issue. Previously it carried out tape-based backups but this proved to be inconsistent. Owen Rawlinson adds: "NetApp has provided us with consistent flexibility across all of our sites which ensures we are not only compliant with mandatory requirements governing data, but moving forward it provides us with absolute confidence that the business is on a firm foundation."

Management tools underpin data centre operations
Swinton's data centre operations are like a beating heart ensuring mission-critical data keeps the business functioning at optimal levels.

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NetApp management tools such as SnapMirror, SnapVault and FlexClone are helping the business thrive by creating replicated snap shots and test environments to facilitate data availability, minimise downtime and implement data protection strategies. Multiple copies of up to 45TB of data are easily created.

Scaling out to meet growing business requirements

NetApp clustered Data ONTAP provides unique scale-out functionality replacing traditional scale-up mechanisms which typically require the replacing of disk drives with faster or newer models or replacing old array controllers with newer controllers. The scale-out approach simply adds additional resources to the existing storage pool. Owen Rawlinson says: "I'm impressed by the NetApp innovation and flexibility. Together with management tools clustered Data ONTAP makes capacity planning very easy and allows us to easily scale sideways if we need more storage."

An eye to the future

An important component within Swinton's business transformation process is to make use of big data analysis to identify new opportunities and drive new business while also responding quickly to changing market conditions. Owen Rawlinson adds: "Because we are on aggregator sites such as Compare the Market, we have to analyse data quickly so we can change our offers based on the results. The NetApp platform allows us to analyse much bigger data sets which also leads us into big data potential. This provides exciting potential for the company in terms of identifying completely new opportunities."

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

- NetApp FAS8000, NetApp FAS3250, and clustered Data ONTAP

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