

Acronis True Image Success Story – Hardee County Board of County Commissioners, Florida

Company

- Hardee County Board of County Commissioners, Florida

Industry

- Local Government

Key Challenges

- Fast bare-metal restore
- Complete system restore
- Short backup cycle
- Easy to use and administer

Environment

- 4 Mission-critical servers running Microsoft Windows and 1 server running SUSE Openexchange Server
- 25 Laptops running Microsoft Windows

Solution

- Acronis True Image Server for Windows
- Acronis True Image Server for Linux
- Acronis True Image Workstation

Business Benefits

- Decreased recovery time from 72 hours to 8 minutes
- Decreased administration time from 2 hours to 20 minutes a week per server
- Easy to use, no training required to implement the system

Background

Founded in 1921 and named for Florida Gov. Cary A. Hardee, Hardee County is located in central Florida. The county was ground zero when the eye of the Category 4 storm Hurricane Charley hit Florida on August 13, 2004. Hurricane Charley ravaged this community, damaging or destroying 75% of the buildings and housing in the county. Roads were completely impassable after the storm and the land-line phone system, cell phone system, satellite service, and radio communications were unavailable. However, one means of communication was still available after the storm passed – the email system for the Hardee County Emergency Management Department.

Challenges

Like so many government and commercial organizations, Hardee County's original IT backup strategy was to use a tape-based backup system. Although the application functioned correctly, it was cumbersome to use and manage. Incremental backups took two hours to complete because of the media change requirements and a bare-metal system restore took 72 hours! The Hardee County Information Technology Services knew the residents of Hardee County were relying on the Emergency Management Department to continue to provide mission critical services in the event of a catastrophic hurricane and the 72-hour restore time would not allow the department to do this. Clearly, a 72-hour data restoration window was unacceptable in case of an emergency; the county had to find a more efficient way of not only protecting its data, but also making sure it would be available to be restored very quickly.

As part of its preparation for the 2004 hurricane season, the county began searching for a replacement solution that supported disk-based storage and could restore an entire system in minutes, not days. Moreover, the county wanted a solution that could be scheduled for lights-out backup and was easy to use, as one individual was responsible for all IT services in the department. A number of products were tested and evaluated on each of the three mission-critical servers running an email server, a web server, and a data server. One of the finalists for the tests was Acronis True Image Server. The other products evaluated had issues that prevented the department from successfully imaging and restoring each server. However, on each server Acronis True Image Server performed flawlessly; the server was restored completely, literally in minutes. "We tested Acronis True Image Server on each of our three mission-critical servers and it worked fine. We could not get the product to misbehave" said Don Faulkner, Hardee County IT Specialist.

Based on the flawless performance of Acronis True Image, Hardee County purchased three Acronis True Image Server licenses. The software was installed on each of the three mission-critical servers and backup images were archived to a network-attached storage (NAS) server at an offsite location. Servers were scheduled to be imaged on a daily basis at 11 p.m. nightly.

Acronis True Image Server was a godsend. Without this application we would have had no communication with the outside world for almost a week, significantly delaying the assistance we desperately needed to provide to Hardee County residents after the storm.

Don Faulkner, IT Specialist

Hardee County Board of County Commissioners, Florida

Hurricane Charlie Lands

At approximately 5 p.m. that fateful August day in 2004, Hurricane Charley roared into Hardee County. Battering the county for nearly two hours, the storm wreaked significant damage to the area. Throughout the storm, the County Emergency Management Department not only was dealing with the ongoing crisis, it was planning the county's recovery. Running on a backup generator for power after the storm passed, the department's first priority was communication. "I remember the director of Emergency Management asking what are we going to do now because the phones, cell phones, satellite, and radio communication systems were completely wiped away by the storm," said Faulkner. "I told him that we were powering the T1 data line with our backup generator and that email system was still up." Based on that, Emergency Management began communicating with the State and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for assistance via email.

Acronis True Image Enables Communication with the Outside World

Unfortunately, the backup generator was having issues and at 11:30 p.m. that night, the unit supplying power to the county's web server failed. "The battery backups were not charging and the generator running our web server failed, causing the server to crash. The server was running our internet site, DNS server, authentication server, and security server," Faulkner said. He began the server recovery process using Microsoft tools but was unable to recover the server because the system partition was completely wiped away. Next, he located the most recent Acronis image of the server created earlier that evening, which was archived on the offsite NAS server located in a secure building. He went through the recovery process using Acronis True Image Server and restored the entire server in minutes. "Before we lost power, Acronis True Image Server completed it's regularly scheduled 11 p.m. daily image task. We used this image to restore the entire web server in just eight minutes."

For almost one full week after the storm, email was the only form of communication the county had with the outside world. "Acronis True Image Server was a godsend. Without this application we would have had no communication with the outside world for almost a week, significantly delaying the assistance we desperately needed to provide to Hardee County residents after the storm," Faulkner noted.

Take 2: Hurricane Frances Lands

Like the 2005 Hurricane Season in the Gulf States, the 2004 Hurricane season was an active one in Florida. Just a couple weeks after Charley, Hurricane Frances slammed into Florida in early September. Hardee County was not spared in the second storm. Even though it was not as powerful a hurricane, a Category 2 as opposed to a Category 4, it was a slow-moving storm that caused significant damage to the county. "We lost most of our workstations in the weeks following Hurricane Charley. Only four of 25 original workstations were usable by then," Faulkner said. The Hardee County School District loaned the department 10 laptops. "After the delivery of the laptops, I had a very short window to deploy these laptops. The laptops were bare and needed the operating system and all applications installed before Hurricane Frances hit." The department had previously purchased licenses for Acronis True Image Workstation. Knowing the cloning capabilities of this product, Faulkner built one standard system, imaged it, and used that image to deploy the other nine workstations. "Preparing the first laptop took approximately three hours. However, with Acronis True Image Workstation, I was able to deploy all of the remaining nine laptops in just 22 minutes. Acronis True Image saved us once again," Faulkner said.

"Thanks to Acronis and the Hardee County School System, we were fully prepared for Hurricane Jeanne when it hit us a few weeks after Frances."

Preparing for the Future

Hardee County is still recovering from the 2004 hurricane season. The County Information Technology Services has expanded its server base so that each server performs only 2 tasks. If one server goes down, the services provided by a redundant server are still available. Currently, all mission-critical servers are running Acronis True Image, including the DNS server, the active directory server, the mail server, and the web server. As more funding becomes available, the IT department plans to expand the implementation to all servers in the network.

All members of the Emergency Management department's staff now use laptops rather than workstations to ensure that the business can continue in an alternate location. One laptop in the department can act as server to provide the mission-critical applications, giving the county complete server redundancy. "When a bad hurricane season hits an area, statistics have shown that this same area will be hit with another bad season within two years. However, we learned from the 2004 hurricane season and have taken steps to ensure that we can continue providing services to county residents. Acronis True Image is a vital part of this planning, as it allows us to recover mission-critical systems and continue operations within minutes of a critical failure," Faulkner concluded.

For additional information, please visit <http://www.acronis.com/>

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