IT Project Services - Case Study
New College Leicester

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The Challenge
When the college experienced a major hardware failure and subsequent data loss, they needed to put measures in place to minimise the possibility of such an event occurring again and, should it happen be in a better position to respond quickly with zero data loss.

The event was the result of legacy server hardware, having pushed their direct attached storage to the limit. The consequences, were three weeks of effort to restore data in an attempt to recover from the event.

"It was a pretty catastrophic failure. The server which went down was old and although we were just about able to source some replacement parts, we went through three new drives and a raid controller trying to fix it – none of which worked, resulting in a degree of data loss. Any data loss is unacceptable" explains Iain Fallon, IT Manager at New College. With critical data like student course work at risk the college needed a more resilient solution to safeguard them in the future.

With the loss of the file server, New College also required immediate capacity to keep their systems operational.

However, with a new modern network on the horizon, the result of major school improvements, New College needed to ensure that the chosen solution bridged the storage and backup shortcomings of here and now. It would then be usefully re-purposed as part of the new infrastructure. They turned to CCS Media; their trusted IT partner to solicit recommendations on how to tackle the challenge.

New College needed to ensure that the chosen solution bridged the storage and backup shortcomings of here and now.

"We wanted something we could take forward in our network in a different role, yet was up to the immediate challenges we faced. As a school we are budget conscious, so whatever solution we opted for it needed to deliver exceptional value."

Welcome to
New College Leicester
Learning and Sports Village
"Outstanding Progress for All"

nimblestorage

Lee Smith, Storage Specialist at CCS Media picks up the story. "New College had been looking at many of the mainstream vendors but the solutions under consideration didn't deliver as much punch for your pound in my opinion. With one eye on the new upgraded infrastructure, I felt that they could get something more functionally rich that delivered better performance and importantly, would have the potential to play a greater role for them in the future environment".

New College handles a lot of media rich data on behalf of its students so performance and scalability would be important characteristics of whatever solution was eventually selected, especially as their network grew. Operating 500 workstations, supporting 1200 users and managing peripheral functions like websites, door security and CCTV the school generates vast amounts of data.

"We liked what we saw and our own independent research revealed that people seemed to rate the Nimble Storage products.

The scalability of the array, in particular, really appealed as we could see it having important longevity with the arrival of the new network."

"It's mind-blowing. I keep adding jobs to the backup routine and it just keeps handling it.

The SIMS backup previously took about 90 minutes – the Nimble Storage array takes only ten! – a fraction of the time of the server-DAS arrangement we had previously"."

The Solution

CCS Media suggested that New College take a look at Nimble Storage. An emerging vendor, they had successfully delivered a number of other installations using the technology to great effect. Fully hot-swappable componentry, online monitoring of arrays and the ability to mix up flash and traditional SATA disk to achieve a solution that optimised both performance and capacity were compelling reasons for New College to explore it further.

An online demonstration of the Nimble Storage technology was arranged, which suitably impressed the team at New College.

The decision made, New College opted to install the Nimble Storage array themselves, having witnessed how easy the appliances were to setup and confident in the high levels of support promised by both the vendor and CCS Media.

The solution was originally scoped with more than twice the immediate capacity necessary, providing plenty of headroom for the college to grow into, although the option to add further shelves to the array and expand capacity is easily achieved.

"I couldn't believe how simple it was. I literally followed the instructions in the box and had the array fully operational in less than half a day!" claims Fallon. Installation was just the first window into how easy the solution would be. With only a small IT team supporting the campus, simplicity makes a big difference to what they can achieve, and the Nimble Storage solution has not let them down. Functionality such as connectivity and management of the appliance over a web browser, inline compression and de-duplication all reduce overheads and automate routine tasks.

This is the first time the college has had an array for file storage and is a big step up from the direct-attached storage they had previously, in the failed server. For six weeks, the array operated as an important file store and back-up device before the new network was commissioned. Thereafter it has been re-purposed as part of their DR strategy, with its primary function as a back-up target for data protection. They now run three daily back-up routines covering all shared areas, user data, and their School Information Management System (SIMS). Still, they are only using 25% of the available capacity.

About New College Leicester

New College Leicester is a community college serving over 800 students aged 11-18. It is a Foundation School with a Charitable Trust. Its mission is to provide "Outstanding progress for all". IT has an important role to play for the college; enhancing student experience, as a tool for teachers and in the day-to-day management of the school and its facilities.

"We would never have even considered Nimble Storage without the guidance of CCS Media. In this instance their view of the market, genuine knowledge of us as a customer and enthusiasm to find an all-round good fit made the difference".

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