

AOK SACHSEN

FILE AREA NETWORK

AOK Sachsen Optimizes File Data Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technology Challenge

Eliminate the increasing costs and complexity of managing growing amounts of file data in a distributed computing environment

Solution

- Brocade® StorageX®

Benefits

- Efficient, centralized file data management and reduced infrastructure costs
- More effective utilization of existing storage resources
- Increased IT and end-user productivity for improved business agility
- Automated, non-disruptive data migration, consolidation, and failover for improved business continuity

AOK Sachsen, the Saxonian subsidiary of the largest public health insurance organization in Germany, has more than two million insureds and 102 branches. As a result, the insurer produces and processes enormous quantities of data. With a highly distributed IT environment to support, AOK Sachsen realized that its fast-growing volumes of file-based information in particular were becoming a significant management issue. Storage costs for the distributed IT centers were high, and file management was becoming increasingly cost-intensive and laborious—making it increasingly important for AOK Sachsen to simplify file management across its enterprise.

With the goal of improving the administration, availability, and security of its file data, the company enacted a plan for consolidation in 2003. At first, it was impossible for AOK Sachsen administrators to consolidate all of the data in the company's main IT center without modifying the existing storage infrastructure and, as a result, the storage capacity tripled. In order to better manage the growing amount of data, the

insurer invested in additional filers from Network Appliance. Because availability for the company's more than four million files was of the highest priority, AOK Sachsen administrators utilized NetApp SnapMirror replication software to mirror the data through a pair of NetApp filers across different locations.

VIRTUALIZATION OF FILE-BASED DATA

After consolidating data at one location, the company began searching for a way to better manage the huge and growing quantity of file data while utilizing the existing storage systems more effectively. Because file access for applications and users had to be processed using fixed network paths, there was little flexibility in file management. As a result, system managers decided to utilize the standard Microsoft Distributed File System (DFS) service that enables administrators to decouple the logical view of file data from its physical storage location by using a global namespace.

While looking for a solution to simplify DFS namespace management and increase functionality, AOK Sachsen administrators learned about Brocade StorageX during a workshop with NuView GmbH, a Brocade Alliance Partner. “We wanted to implement numerous functions that DFS did not support,” explains Wolfgang Gaunitz, Senior Manager of Server and Network Management at AOK Sachsen. “To leverage the advantages of this Microsoft-based service to the full extent, we decided to implement Brocade StorageX.”

BROCADE STORAGEX GLOBAL NAMESPACE MANAGEMENT

As a scalable file management solution built around DFS, Brocade StorageX helps administrators create, monitor, and manage a virtual file system or global namespace in new or existing storage infrastructures. Global namespaces in a file environment enable users to access files without knowing where the files are physically stored, similar to accessing a Web site without having to know the IP address. After virtualizing and/or decoupling file paths from physical storage locations, administrators can easily distribute file data across storage systems without causing downtime for applications or end users.

Before Brocade StorageX, storage utilization at AOK Sachsen was approximately 60 percent. Today, the insurer is effectively utilizing its storage resources at an 80-percent rate—an achievement that helps reduce both hardware allocation and storage management costs.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

In typical Brocade StorageX installations for managing and consolidating file-based data in NAS and SAN environments, all individual file paths are virtualized. This approach gives administrators complete independence from physical storage. In addition, Brocade StorageX contains tools for automating common file data management tasks.

At AOK Sachsen, however, the emphasis was on one specific aspect: availability. After consolidating files at a central location, AOK Sachsen stores the data in a mirrored configuration. In the event of an outage, all virtual links must be switched to the redundant storage systems within the shortest possible timeframe. With nearly 5000 users and 5000 links for each storage site, the insurer discovered that the average switchover would require up to 10 minutes.

Because a system standstill of 10 minutes was both organizationally and economically unacceptable, AOK Sachsen wanted to significantly reduce this time. As a result, the insurer decided to configure the links one level higher in the DFS hierarchy. Instead of 5000 links, only four DFS links need to be switched during an outage. With this solution, the switchover time has been reduced to just a few minutes.

FUTURE-ORIENTED TECHNOLOGY

Brocade StorageX has opened new horizons at AOK Sachsen for quickly and easily managing file-based data, and especially for minimizing downtime. Furthermore,

WHY BROCADE

- Highly scalable, easily administered Global Namespace
- Integration with Microsoft Distributed File System (DFS)
- Simple, fast deployment with functionality aligned to specific business requirements
- Streamlined file management, consolidation, and restoration across the enterprise

this software solution has also significantly reduced the required time to administer enterprise-wide file data management.

In the future, AOK Sachsen intends to implement other Brocade StorageX functionality, in particular automated capacity balancing across the various storage systems. This feature uses predefined rules to automatically migrate files across the available storage systems. It helps optimize utilization and capacity balancing of resources with almost no manual intervention.

“Leveraging additional features available in Brocade StorageX, we will be able to better manage our storage resources. In particular, the automated capacity balancing function will save us a lot of time and help to maximize storage system performance,” Gaunitz concludes.

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