

The Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board Automates Backup Processes, Improves Disaster Recovery with ExaGrid

Customer Overview

State of Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board controls alcoholic beverages through distribution, licensing, and enforcement. The Board operates a chain of retail stores selling the majority of liquor purchased in Alabama. The Board operates in an efficient and cost effective manner to ensure that Alabamians who choose to purchase beverages are able to do so at a fair price while generating considerable revenue for the State and local governing authorities. The ABC Board also licenses commercial firms to sell alcoholic beverages and conducts audits, collects taxes, and disburses revenue obtained from those taxes.

Tape Backups Unreliable, Time Consuming

The ABC Board has two separate networks, one for its retail operation and a second for its general business and licensing data. The Board's IT staff had been backing up both networks to tape, but long backup times and reliability and management issues made it difficult to complete backups consistently each and every night.

In addition, because its retail operation handles sensitive credit card data, the Board must adhere to strict Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards to ensure that data is secure. But while the staff was able to meet the standards with tape, the process was time consuming and cumbersome because when the tapes were transported offsite, staff members had to be accompanied by law enforcement officers.

"Dealing with tape was cumbersome and time consuming. We needed a more reliable backup method that could improve our data security and our ability to recover from a disaster," said Chad Holton, network administrator for the Alabama ABC Board. "We decided to look for a disk-based approach so that we could reduce our reliance on tape and automate more of our backup processes."

Cost-Effective ExaGrid System Speeds Backups, Improves Disaster Recovery

After considering solutions from several deduplication vendors, the Board chose a two-site ExaGrid system to provide both primary and secondary backup.

The Board installed a pair of ExaGrid systems in its main datacenter for primary backup of both networks and two more systems in its disaster recovery center. Data from the primary ExaGrid systems is replicated each night to the secondary systems in case it is need for disaster recovery. The ExaGrid systems work alongside the Board's existing backup application, Symantec's Backup Exec.

"The ExaGrid system was more cost-effective than other deduplication solutions that we evaluated," said Holton. "We were also impressed with ExaGrid's post-process approach to data deduplication. It's been very effective at reducing our data, and we've had dedupe rates as high as 59:1 for our SharePoint data."

ExaGrid combines last backup compression along with data deduplication, which stores changes from backup to backup instead of storing full file copies. This unique approach reduces the disk space required by a range of 10:1 to 50:1 or more, delivering unparalleled cost savings and performance. ExaGrid delivers extremely fast backup performance because data is written directly to disk, and data deduplication is performed post-process after the data is stored to reduce data.

Holton also noted that since installing the ExaGrid systems, the Board's backup times have been significantly reduced. For example, backups from the user network used to take 11 hours with tape, but backup times have been reduced to three hours with the ExaGrid systems.

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Chad Holton
Network Administrator
Alabama Alcoholic Beverage
Control Board

"With tape, we could only run one backup job at a time, but we can run several jobs together with the ExaGrid. It's far faster and more reliable than tape," said Holton.

Intuitive Interface, Easy Management and Scalability for the Future

ExaGrid comes packaged as a turnkey appliance and was designed to be easy to deploy and manage and to deliver maximum uptime with redundant, hot-swappable components. All components are fully supported by ExaGrid's trained, in-house engineers dedicated to individual accounts.

"Installing the ExaGrid system was very straightforward. We got it up and running ourselves with a little help from our ExaGrid support engineer, who dialed in remotely to make sure it was set up correctly. Our support engineer is responsive and knowledgeable, and we've had a very good support experience," said Holton. "Once it was installed, we found the system easy to use and the user interface intuitive. There really wasn't much of a learning curve for us to get up to speed with the system."

Holton also said that scalability was another factor in choosing the ExaGrid system. ExaGrid's GRID computing software makes the system highly scalable, and when plugged into a switch, different sized configurations can be mixed and matched into a single GRID system with capacities of up to a 60TB full backup plus retention. Once virtualized, they appear as a single system to the backup server, and load balancing of all data across servers is automatic.

"We're confident that if our backup needs grow, we can easily expand the ExaGrid system to handle more data. ExaGrid's modular design will make it easy to add capacity in the future," he said. "The ExaGrid was a nice solution for our environment. We were able to nearly eliminate tape, make our backups faster and more reliable and improve our ability to recover from a disaster. It has absolutely met our expectations."

ExaGrid and Symantec Backup Exec

Symantec Backup Exec provides cost-effective, high-performance, and certified disk-to-disk-to-tape backup and recovery – including continuous data protection for Microsoft Exchange, SQL, file servers, and workstations. High-performance agents and options provide fast, flexible, granular protection and scalable management of local and remote server backups.

Organizations using Symantec Backup Exec can look to ExaGrid as an alternative to tape for nightly backups. ExaGrid sits behind existing backup applications, such as Symantec Backup Exec, providing faster and more reliable backups and restores. In a network running Symantec Backup Exec, using ExaGrid in place of a tape backup system is as easy as pointing existing backup jobs at a NAS share on the ExaGrid system. Backup jobs are sent directly from the backup application to the ExaGrid for onsite backup to disk.

Intelligent Data Protection

ExaGrid's turnkey disk-based backup system combines high quality SATA drives with byte-level data deduplication, delivering a disk-based solution that is more cost effective than standard SATA drives. ExaGrid's byte-level data deduplication technology stores only the changes from backup to backup instead of storing full file copies, reducing the amount of disk needed by a range of 10:1 to 50:1 or more, resulting in a solution that is 25 to 30% the cost of standard SATA drives. The ExaGrid system is easy to install and use and works seamlessly with popular backup applications, so organizations can retain their investment in existing applications and processes.

ExaGrid servers can be used at primary and secondary sites to supplement or eliminate offsite tapes with live data repositories for disaster recovery. For more information about ExaGrid, please visit our website www.ExaGrid.com or call us at 1-800-868-6985.

ABOUT EXAGRID

ExaGrid is the leader in cost-effective disk-based backup solutions. A highly scalable system that works with existing backup applications, the ExaGrid system is ideal for companies looking to quickly eliminate the hassles of tape backup while reducing their existing backup windows. ExaGrid's innovative approach minimizes the amount of data to be stored by providing standard data compression for the most recent backups along with byte-level data deduplication technology for all previous backups. Customers can deploy ExaGrid at primary and secondary sites to supplement or eliminate offsite tapes with live data repositories or for disaster recovery.

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