

Clifton Gunderson Counts on ExaGrid for More Efficient Backups

Customer Overview

Clifton Gunderson, ranked as one of the nation's largest certified public accounting and consulting firms, provides a wide range of assurance, accounting, tax, and consulting services to clients in a variety of industries. Founded in 1960, Clifton Gunderson has a staff of more than 2,000 professionals serving clients from 45 offices across the country. The firm has been recognized as one of the country's best places to work and is based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Fast Data Growth Taxed Tape Library

Clifton Gunderson operates two datacenters, one in Madison, Wisconsin and a second in a colocation facility in Lisle, Illinois. The firm had been backing up data to tape libraries in each location but the systems had run out of capacity and the IT staff was spending too much time and money on juggling tapes and managing backups and restores.

"Our tape library was maxed out and we were going through a ton of tapes. It was also expensive to pay our colocation facility to swap tapes in and out and to perform restores," said Dave Treamer, senior associate storage architect at Clifton Gunderson. "We needed a scalable solution that could enable us to reduce tape with remote management capabilities."

Cost-Effective ExaGrid System Reduces Reliance on Tape, Built-in Data Deduplication Maximizes Use of Disk Space

After considering solutions from EMC, Data Domain and Symantec, Clifton Gunderson chose a disk-based backup system with data deduplication from ExaGrid. The firm purchased two 20TB ExaGrid systems and installed one in each datacenter. Data is backed up locally and then replicated between the two sites. The ExaGrid systems work along with Veritas NetBackup, Clifton Gunderson's existing backup application.

"There was a lot more flexibility in the ExaGrid product than in the other systems we looked at. The ExaGrid was cost effective and its built-in data deduplication technology will enable us to really maximize disk space.

We're amazed at how efficient it is and it lets us keep lots of data on hand and ready in case we need to perform a restore," said Treamer.

ExaGrid's post-process data deduplication processes data after it has landed on the system, ensuring the fastest backup times possible. 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.

Since installing the ExaGrid system, the firm has reduced its reliance on tape and now only uses it for monthly and yearly backups. The firm has been able to save a considerable amount of money on tape and on labor costs associated with restores performed in its colocation facility.

"We were being charged \$220 per hour to have someone at our colocation facility work on our tape library. We had them swap tapes and usually called in three to four restore requests per day. It got expensive and it was time consuming. With the ExaGrid, we've been able to reduce those costs considerably and our restores take no time at all. Our users are thrilled with how fast we can complete their restore requests," said Treamer.

Responsive Customer Support

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.

"Our data is growing by leaps and bounds and we needed to ensure that our backup environment could scale to meet our future needs. The ExaGrid system's GRID architecture will enable us to quickly and easily grow the system to accommodate more data. It's a system that will serve us well now and into the future."

Dave Treamer
Sr. Associate Storage
Architect
Clifton Gunderson



“Since installing the ExaGrid system, we’ve been able to significantly reduce our backup times and our jobs are now completed well within our backup window. We’ve been extremely pleased with our ExaGrid support team. They have worked closely with us to make our backups faster and more efficient. They’ve been with us every step of the way in helping us decide how to structure our backup jobs and how to fine tune the environment so that we get the most out of the system,” Treameer said. “The support team has also been incredibly responsive. When there’s an issue, they don’t point fingers. They use their expertise to get to the root of a problem so that things get resolved quickly.”

Scalability to Accommodate Data Growth

System scalability was an important consideration in choosing ExaGrid. Due to a new company-wide paperless initiative, the Clifton-Gunderson experienced a data growth rate of 78 percent last year, and the IT staff expects the data growth to continue over the next few years.

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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. “The ExaGrid system has taken the headaches out of our daily backup processes. I monitor the system each and every day, but I don’t have to worry anymore about our backups.

The ExaGrid system enables us to work more effectively because we can now spend the time we used to spend on backups on higher priority things,” said Treameer.

ExaGrid and NetBackup

Symantec’s Veritas NetBackup delivers high performance data protection that scales to protect the largest UNIX, Windows, Linux and NetWare environments. With complete protection from remote office to center to vault, NetBackup offers a single console for all backup and recovery operations. Organizations using Veritas NetBackup can look to ExaGrid as an alternative to tape for nightly backups. ExaGrid sits behind existing backup applications, such as NetBackup, providing faster and more reliable backups and restores. In a network running NetBackup, 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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