Blackfoot Modernizes Infrastructure by Implementing ExaGrid to Simplify Backup Management

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>
> **Mike Hanson**
> **Senior Systems Administrator**

Key Benefits:

- After trying many solutions, Blackfoot finds ExaGrid-Veeam offers best backup performance

- ExaGrid's integration with Veeam allows IT staff to use more of Veeam's features and simplifies backup management

- ExaGrid stands by its product, quickly resolving issue and offering 'stellar customer service'

- Simplicity and reliability of ExaGrid system gives Blackfoot IT staff their 'weekends back'

Customer Overview

Headquartered in Missoula, Montana, Blackfoot Communications is the partner of choice for business voice, data, cloud and IT services across the Pacific Northwest. In addition, Blackfoot provides residential phone and broadband internet services across Western Montana and Eastern Idaho.

Switching to ExaGrid 'Changed My Life'

The IT staff at Blackfoot had tried many backup solutions before switching to an ExaGrid system. "We'd used Veritas Backup Exec for more than 15 years and initially backed up to different generations of LTO tape libraries, before eventually switching to disk-attached storage," said Mike Hanson, Senior Systems Administrator at Blackfoot. "Then, we bought a Dell EMC Data Domain to work with Backup Exec and it worked well until we entered the VMware space. It became clear that Backup Exec is designed for physical servers, it's not designed to handle hundreds of virtual servers; it's an agent-based backup solution. Many of those agent-based backups were failing, so I was spending up to two hours each day trying to fix our backups and manage them."

In addition to the hours of backup management, Blackfoot's IT staff also struggled with a backup window that had grown to 30 hours. "A single full backup of our infrastructure was taking 30 hours which forced us to run full backups once a month, there wasn't enough time to run a full backup every week—30 hours is ridiculous!" said Hanson.

"Eventually, we were introduced to Veeam and after a trial of the solution, we jumped in with both feet. Veeam worked well with Data Domain, but we were limited in how we could use it. Our previous solution didn't support Veeam's synthetic fulls or instant restores, so I decided to look into better options. After doing some research, I learned about ExaGrid and reached out to my reseller to set up some calls.

"We installed ExaGrid about a year ago, and it changed my life! The impact of the full backups on our systems has been reduced from 30 hours to 3.5 hours. ExaGrid is able to create synthetic full backups using Veeam's Accelerated Data Mover within the appliance, having minimal impact on our production infrastructure. The synthetic full itself takes about nine hours, but after the incremental, which takes three and a half, our systems are free to perform other duties, so it's had a huge impact on our environment," Hanson said. He has found that using ExaGrid has made backing up Blackfoot's data effortless. "What I love most about using ExaGrid is the simplicity of it all. It integrates well with my backup solution, and the system runs itself. It's given me my weekends back," he said.

ExaGrid-Veeam Integration Simplifies Backup Management

Blackfoot installed an ExaGrid system at its primary site that replicates to its disaster recovery (DR) site. "It took longer to rack the system than it did to configure it; it was very quick! The configuration of ExaGrid with Veeam took under half an hour, and then

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I was able to run the first backups. Our environment is now 90% virtual and Veeam supports the remaining physical backups that we require as well," said Hanson.

Now that Blackfoot uses Veeam with ExaGrid, the IT staff uses more of Veeam's features, such as weekly synthetic fulls, SureBackup™ verifications, and Instant VM Recovery®, as well as the Veeam Accelerated Data Mover built into the ExaGrid system. "When I get to work in the morning, I check my email and login to the Veeam console. It takes me two minutes to verify my backups, and I move on with my day. It really has changed the way we do business," said Hanson.

Through ExaGrid's unique Landing Zone and integrated the Veeam Data Mover within the appliance, backups are written Veeam-to-Veeam versus Veeam-to-CIFS, which provides a 30% increase in backup performance. ExaGrid is the only product on the market that offers this performance enhancement. Because ExaGrid has integrated the Veeam Data Mover, Veeam synthetic fulls can be created at a rate that is six times faster than any other solution. ExaGrid stores the most recent Veeam backups in undeduplicated form in its Landing Zone, has the Veeam Data Mover running on each ExaGrid appliance, and has processor in each appliance in a scale-out architecture. This combination of Landing Zone, Veeam Data Mover, and scale-out compute provides the fastest Veeam synthetic fulls versus any other solution or configuration on the market.

ExaGrid Stands By Its Product

Hanson realized early on that ExaGrid stands by its product. "When we first started using ExaGrid, we realized there was an issue with how our system was sized. The ExaGrid sales engineer that sized our environment misunderstood our retention requirements, so we were running out of space just a few weeks after installation.

"I called ExaGrid and my support engineer realized the issue, and then discussed it with the ExaGrid support team. I got a call back from one of the directors of ExaGrid Customer Support letting me know they had realized the mistake and were going to correct it by sending me a new ExaGrid appliance that was resized and recalculated to fit our environment correctly, for free. He told me we would never pay support on that appliance as long as our existing support contract is kept up to date. I knew ExaGrid was the company I wanted to work with from then on."

They acknowledged their mistake and it was corrected properly. It was a stellar customer service experience," said Hanson.

ExaGrid Support 'An Invaluable Resource'

Hanson values the level of support he receives from ExaGrid. "When there's a software upgrade for our ExaGrid system, my support engineer calls me to let me know he's uploaded it to our system and that we can apply it when we're ready. When I was using Data Domain, I would have to go to their website, search for the proper upgrade, and install it myself. ExaGrid is so helpful and it's reduced the amount of system maintenance that I need to manage.

"Our ExaGrid support engineer has become an extension of our department. He's an invaluable resource. I don't need to get in touch with him too often, but whenever we need to work through an issue, I give him a call or send him an email and he's ready to help," said Hanson. "When we decided to add an ExaGrid appliance to our system, we moved another appliance from our primary site to our DR site and our support engineer helped us migrate that data. He actually did most of the reconfiguration while I was driving from site to site, and we were up and running within a matter of hours."

The ExaGrid system can easily scale to accommodate data growth. ExaGrid's computing software makes the system highly scalable, and when plugged into a switch, appliances of any size or age can be mixed and matched in a single system with capacities of up to a 2PB full backup plus retention and an ingest rate of up to 432TB per hour. Once virtualized, they appear as a single system to the backup server, and load balancing of all data across servers is automatic.

Hanson has found that using an ExaGrid has made backing up Blackfoot's data effortless. "What I love most about using ExaGrid is the simplicity of it all. It integrates well with my backup solution, and the system runs itself. It's given me my weekends back." The ExaGrid system was designed to be easy to set up and maintain, and ExaGrid's industry-leading customer support team is staffed by trained, in-house level 2 engineers who are assigned to individual accounts. The system is fully supported, and was designed and manufactured for maximum uptime with redundant, hot-swappable components.

About ExaGrid

ExaGrid provides Tiered Backup Storage with a unique disk-cache Landing Zone, long-term retention repository and scale-out architecture. ExaGrid's Landing Zone enables the fastest backups, restores, and instant VM recoveries. The retention repository offers the lowest cost for long-term retention. ExaGrid's scale-out architecture includes full appliances in a scalable system. Learn more at **www.exagrid.com**.