

School District Installs ExaGrid, Easily Scales System to Accommodate Data Growth

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY



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Doug Small
Storage Engineer

Key Benefits:

- ExaGrid has a reasonable price point and maintenance costs unlike proprietary systems
- The system works seamlessly with Symantec NetBackup
- Less time is spent managing backup jobs
- Automated offsite replication provides DR protection
- Backup windows have been cut by more than half

Customer Overview

Located in Jefferson County, Colorado, Jeffco Public Schools is the largest school district in the state. Jeffco Public Schools serves more than 84,000 students in 145 schools, including 8 option schools and 11 charter schools.

ExaGrid System Reduces Costs, Improves Disaster Recovery

Jeffco Public Schools had been backing up its data to a four-year-old IBM backup solution but when its maintenance agreement ended, the district’s IT staff weighed ongoing costs and future backup requirements and decided to look for a new solution.

“Our old solution involved writing data to an IBM disk array and then copying it off to a tape library. Once a week, we would pull tapes and send them to our disaster recovery site. It worked well on a day-to-day basis, but we were concerned about the time it would take for us to recover from a disaster,” said Doug Small, storage engineer for the Jeffco Public Schools. “Financially, it didn’t make sense for us to continue the maintenance contract, especially in light of the fact that the solution wasn’t meeting all of our needs.”

After looking at several different solutions, the school district purchased a two-site ExaGrid system, and installed one unit in its main datacenter and the second offsite for disaster recovery.

“The ExaGrid system is built on commodity hardware with ingenious software that meets our needs. Its price point and maintenance costs were far more reasonable than the proprietary systems we looked at, and we liked that we could continue using Symantec NetBackup as our primary backup application,” said Small.

Small said that the school district saves money with the ExaGrid system, and its

ability to recover from a disaster is far better as well.

“We’re saving a considerable amount of money because we don’t have to continuously purchase media, and we don’t have the maintenance costs associated with trying to keep a tape library up and running. In terms of manpower, we’re spending far less time managing backup jobs and handling tape,” he said. “With the two-site ExaGrid system, we are more confident in our ability to recover from a disaster because our data is automatically replicated offsite each and every night.”

Full Backup Times Reduced by 36 Hours

Jeffco Public Schools has experienced shorter backup times since installing the ExaGrid system. Full backups using its old solution used to start on Friday night at 5:00 p.m. and run until Monday at noon. Now, backups still start at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, but run only until midnight Saturday.

“With our old system, some of our systems were slow on Monday mornings because backups were still running, but that’s not an issue now,” said Small. “Restores are faster, too. I don’t do a lot of restores, but when I do, I’m shocked at how fast they are. Most of the time, they take less than a second. I’ve been doing backups as part of my job for years and it’s such a change from tape, where it can take so much time and effort to perform a simple restore.”



Powerful Data Deduplication Reduces Stored Data to Maximize Disk Space

Small said that Jeffco's old solution incorporated data deduplication technology but it wasn't effective. However, ExaGrid's data deduplication technology has significantly improved retention while ensuring fast backups.

"The ExaGrid system does a terrific job at reducing our data without slowing down the backup performance," said Small.

ExaGrid combines standard compression along with zone-level data deduplication, which stores changes from backup to backup instead of storing full file copies. 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. When a second site is used, the cost savings are even greater because ExaGrid's zone-level data deduplication technology moves only the changes from backup to backup, requiring minimal WAN bandwidth.

Easy Setup, Less Time Spent Managing Backups

"The ExaGrid system was easy to install, and it doesn't take much effort to manage it. The system doesn't need a lot of handholding; all we have to do is create shares and allocate space for the different locations we're backing up. We monitor our backup jobs, but it really doesn't take a lot of our time," Small said.

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 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.

"I spend less time managing backups now because I don't have to deal with tape, and because our backup jobs don't fail, I don't have to spend time troubleshooting. Our backups run better and faster than with tape and without any real intervention from me or any other staff member," said Small.

Small said that the ExaGrid customer support engineer assigned to Jeffco's account helps to ensure that backups run flawlessly.

About ExaGrid Systems, Inc.

Customers worldwide depend on ExaGrid Systems to solve their backup problems—effectively and permanently. ExaGrid's disk-based, scale-out GRID architecture adjusts to increasing backup demands due to constantly growing data volumes. It is the only solution that combines compute with capacity as well as a unique landing zone to permanently shorten backup windows and eliminate expensive forklift upgrades. Learn more at www.exagrid.com.

"The support we get from ExaGrid is fantastic. It's almost a concierge sort of experience, and we don't get that from many vendors. Our support engineer really knows his way around the system and has been available any time we've called about a question or issue," he said.

Scalability to Grow

Jeffco has taken advantage of ExaGrid's GRID architecture to expand the capacity of its disaster recovery site.

ExaGrid uses a GRID-based configuration, so when the system needs to expand, additional appliance nodes are attached to the GRID, bringing with them not only additional disk but also processing power, memory, and bandwidth. This type of configuration allows the system to maintain all the aspects of performance as the amount of data grows. In addition, as new ExaGrid appliance nodes are added to the GRID, the ExaGrid automatically load balances available capacity, maintaining a virtual pool of storage that is shared across the GRID.

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ExaGrid and Symantec NetBackup

Symantec 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 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.