EXAGRID®

Wenatchee Valley College Switches to ExaGrid for Increased Security and Better Backup Performance

WENATCHEE VALLEY COLLEGE

USA

Key Benefits:

- Wenatchee Valley College switches to secure ExaGrid system after another local college is hit with ransomware

- ExaGrid-Veeam solution reduces backup window by 57%

- College's IT staff can restore data quickly during production hours with no impact on end users

- ExaGrid Support is proactive and offers 'personal touch'

- ExaGrid system is reliable with 'no interruptions, no downtime, and no maintenance windows'

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Steve Garcia
Information Security Officer

Customer Overview

Wenatchee Valley College enriches North Central Washington by serving educational and cultural needs of communities and residents throughout the service area. The college provides high-quality transfer, liberal arts, professional/technical, basic skills, and continuing education for students of diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds. The Wenatchee campus is located near the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains, midway between Seattle and Spokane. The WVC at Omak campus is located near the Canadian border in Omak, about 100 miles north of Wenatchee.

ExaGrid-Veeam Solution Replaces Outdated Backup System

The IT staff at Wenatchee Valley College had been backing up the college's data to a Dell DR4000 backup appliance using Veritas Backup Exec. "We were dealing with several different issues at the time: the hardware was at the end of its life and under capacity, our data growth rates were increasing higher than we'd expected, and we were going to run out of space," said Steve Garcia, the college's information security officer. "Adding storage wasn't really an option. I couldn't just add physical hard drives to empty slots, or easily add another appliance or a second chassis that could integrate with the original chassis. It was very complicated. I discussed options with Dell engineers at the same time I was evaluating ExaGrid. I needed a solution that was future-proof, easy to manage, and, above all, reliable."

"We've always been a Dell shop, but I'd heard good things from other colleges and local city and state agencies that use ExaGrid. They had nothing but positive things to say about ExaGrid and with its integration with vCenter and with Veeam backup. Backup Exec hadn't been meeting our expectations either; we ran into a lot of bugs and technical issues with it, and we had very long backup windows, and constant issues with recovering data. We scrapped our old solution and went with an ExaGrid system and Veeam, which tied in nicely with our VMware infrastructure. The combined solution of ExaGrid and Veeam is amazing! They work very well together," said Garcia.

"Now that I've used the ExaGrid-Veeam solution, I've recommended it to colleagues at other community colleges as a solid, reliable solution for any backup infrastructure needs."

ExaGrid Offers a Higher Level of Security

Security was another factor when it came to the Wenatchee Valley College choosing ExaGrid, especially after another local college had fallen victim to a ransomware attack. "The platform itself, from a cybersecurity standpoint, is air-gapped because it's a Linux-based operating system versus Windows. That provides an extra layer of security from ransomware threats and other types of threats that target backup data, because it's more isolated from our standard server workload. If we are compromised, our backup data is not going to be compromised as well," said Garcia.

"A college in our system suffered a massive ransomware attack and all of their servers were impacted, including their backup data, so they couldn't recover anything. We've used their experience as a case study to improve on the areas that they were weak on, the root causes of how it happened, when it happened, and what led up to that ransomware – then made changes to our environment and instituted best practices. Now, even if we are impacted, if our VMware environment and our servers are impacted, we

know that the ExaGrid data will not be impacted. I verified that with the ExaGrid engineers, and with Veeam engineers also, to avoid that scenario," he said.

"It offers peace of mind knowing we have a robust backup system, and that if we are attacked by ransomware, we will get our data back and can resume normal operations. We take precautions to make sure when that does happen – I used to say if that happens, but it's a matter of when now, from my perspective – when that happens, we can recover and we can get our end users back to their day-to-day operations with all their data," said Garcia.

ExaGrid appliances have a network-facing disk-cache Landing Zone where the most recent backups are stored in an undeduplicated format for fast backup and restore performance. Data is deduplicated into a non-network-facing tier called the Repository Tier, for longer-term retention. ExaGrid's unique architecture and features provide comprehensive security including Retention Time-Lock for Ransomware Recovery (RTL), and through the combination of a non-network-facing tier (tiered air gap), a delayed delete policy, and immutable data objects, backup data is protected from being deleted or encrypted. ExaGrid's offline tier is ready for recovery in the event of an attack.

Backup Window Reduced by 57% and Restores No Longer 'Hit or Miss'

Wenatchee Valley College's data is backed up regularly, in nightly incrementals as well as weekly synthetic fulls and monthly fulls, following a grandfather-father-son (GFS) strategy. In the past, Garcia had dealt with excessively long backup windows, but switching to ExaGrid resolved that issue. "Our backup windows used to be around 14 hours, so they would run into normal production hours, and that was a huge deal because our end users would be interrupted. If a backup job was in process, the files would become locked, so I often had to manually stop backup jobs so that an end user could edit a document," he said.

"Since our switch to the ExaGrid-Veeam solution, our backups start at 6:00 p.m. and all of the data is backed up before midnight. It's amazing!"

The ExaGrid-Veeam solution also made restoring data a much quicker process. "It used to take up to six hours to recover data. While I was always sure that the data was backed up, I wasn't always confident that it could be restored. It was always hit-or-miss which caused high stress and a lot of anxiety. Now that we use ExaGrid and Veeam, I have been able to restore a large server, over 1TB, in about an hour and a half. I am able to restore data during production hours with no impact on operations or end users," said Garcia.

ExaGrid writes backups directly to a disk-cache Landing Zone, avoiding inline processing and ensuring the highest possible backup performance, which results in the shortest backup window. Adaptive Deduplication performs deduplication and replication in parallel with backups for a strong recovery point (RPO). As data is being deduplicated to the repository, it can also be replicated to a second ExaGrid site or the public cloud for disaster recovery (DR).

ExaGrid Customer Support Offers Personal Touch

Garcia appreciates ExaGrid's approach to customer support. "I don't think I could ask for a better support engineer. Recently, I was a having a problem after updating our Veeam software and he was able to review our Veeam configuration and then offered to work directly with Veeam support to resolve the issue behind the scenes. In another instance, we had a pending hard drive failure, and before I even knew about it, my ExaGrid support engineer reached out to me about it and let me know he had already shipped a replacement and sent instructions on how to swap it out.

"My support engineer has also been proactive about scheduling firmware updates to the ExaGrid system, so I don't have to manage that myself, which I've had to do with other products," said Garcia. "I've been very happy with ExaGrid, there's been no interruption in backups, no downtime, and no maintenance windows. I can say with 100% confidence that we have a reliable system in place and it works. It's given me peace of mind so I can focus on other projects."

The ExaGrid system was designed to be easy to set up and operate. ExaGrid's industry-leading level 2 senior support engineers are assigned to individual customers, ensuring they always work with the same engineer. Customers never have to repeat themselves to various support staff, and issues get resolved quickly.

About ExaGrid

ExaGrid provides Tiered Backup Storage with a unique disk-cache Landing Zone that enables fastest backups and restores, a Repository Tier that offers the lowest cost for long-term retention and enables ransomware recovery, and scale-out architecture which includes full appliances with up to 2.7PB full backup in a single system.

Learn more at **www.exagrid.com**.

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