

SEMCO ENERGY's Move to Disk Backup With Deduplication Results in Dramatically Faster, More Efficient Backups

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY



"Our IT department's backup administration work has dropped about 90 percent since we started using ExaGrid. The whole tape management process has been eliminated. Now all those hours we'd spend on handling tape can be spent on other important IT initiatives."

Lary O'Connor
System Administrator
LAN/WAN
SEMCO ENERGY, Inc.

Customer Overview

SEMCO ENERGY, Inc., a privately held company, distributes natural gas to approximately 409,000 customers combined in Michigan and in Alaska.

Long Backup Windows and Tape Administration Headaches Take Their Toll

SEMCO ENERGY relied on backing up its data to SAN disk and then copying that data onto tape. The company's data typically included Microsoft-based files, server backups, Exchange backups, SharePoint, SQL and UNIX server backups as well as VMware backups.

As the company's data requirements grew, so did its backup windows and instances of tape failures. Backups regularly took about 24 hours including a day to back up to disk and a second day to duplicate it to tape. According to SEMCO ENERGY System Administrator LAN/WAN Lary O'Connor, managing tapes also became increasingly frustrating. His IT group used to spend two to four hours a day managing the company's tape libraries including exporting tapes, documenting the exports, sending tapes offsite and checking tapes back in.

"Our data requirements kept growing so our backup issues became even more magnified. It also wasn't very cost effective to use our existing SAN disk solution, so we had to make a change," said O'Connor.

ExaGrid Works with Existing Backup Application to Cut Backup Window in Half, Increase Overall Efficiencies

After careful evaluation of all their options, O'Connor and the rest of his team decided that it was necessary to start phasing out

tape. It was crucial for SEMCO ENERGY to not only find a more reliable and scalable solution for data retention but also one that was more cost effective than their current SAN disk/tape backup solution. After thoroughly researching various solutions, SEMCO ENERGY selected ExaGrid's disk-based backup with deduplication solution over several competing solutions. The ExaGrid system works seamlessly with SEMCO's existing backup application, Symantec BackupExec™, at a primary site and also at a secondary site for disaster recovery.

"Cost and the ability to leverage our existing backup infrastructure were key factors for us in selecting ExaGrid," said O'Connor. "We didn't want to just throw away our existing IT investment. We wanted a solution like ExaGrid that could work in conjunction with our backup application to provide the best backups and restores."

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.

"The nice thing was that there was no learning curve needed when we implemented ExaGrid with BackupExec. Our backups still worked the same," said O'Connor. "ExaGrid just sits on the backend and replaces your existing tape or disk application so it's a very seamless transmission."

EXAGRID™

Since implementing ExaGrid, SEMCO ENERGY has seen dramatic results. The company's backup window has been cut in half, from 24 hours to about 12. In addition, SEMCO ENERGY's IT department saves about 20 hours a week that it used to spend on manually processing and administering tape media.

"Our IT department's backup administration work has dropped about 90 percent since we started using ExaGrid. The whole tape management process has been eliminated. Now all those hours we'd spend on handling tape can be spent on other important IT initiatives," said O'Connor.

Flexibility and Scalability to Meet Growing Data Requirements and Company Growth

The ExaGrid system can easily be scaled to meet increased demand. 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 100TB 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 love the fact that ExaGrid can easily scale as our data grows without costing us an arm and a leg," said O'Connor. "ExaGrid allows us to seamlessly add additional servers if we decide to increase our retention down the road."

World-class Technical Support

ExaGrid's trained, in-house engineers provide dedicated support to individual accounts.

"Our experience with ExaGrid's technical support team has been excellent. We have a dedicated support manager who is very proactive and knowledgeable about the product but also our environment," said O'Connor.

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.

ExaGrid and Symantec BackupExec: a Powerful Combination

Using ExaGrid along with Symantec BackupExec provides cost-effective disk-to-disk-to-tape backup and recovery – including continuous data protection for a wide variety of data types from databases, Microsoft Exchange, SQL, file servers, and workstations. In addition, BackupExec's cutting-edge granular recovery technology (GRT) enables you to recover critical data, individual email, documents, files and objects, in a matter of seconds.

Organizations using Symantec BackupExec can look to ExaGrid as an alternative to tape for nightly backups. ExaGrid sits behind existing backup applications, such as Symantec BackupExec, providing faster and more reliable backups and restores. In a network running Symantec BackupExec, 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.

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 us at www.exagrid.com or call us at 1-800-868-6985.