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Steve Corsbie, Group IT Manager, Multimedia International Services

## Business Profile

Company Name:  
Multimedia International Services (MIS)

Headquarters:  
Blackpool, England

Industry:  
Advertising

Founded:  
1999

- Business Environment:
- Operates the UK's largest electronic point of purchase advertising network.
  - Helps 18,000 local businesses advertise on digital screens in busy locations.
  - Has offices in England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.
  - Continues to invest in powerful technology

Vision Solutions Product:  
Double-Take® Availability™

Implementation Partner:  
Alchemy Systems

## Critical issue

Since IT resources drove MIS' core deliverables, the company invested in an IBM server cluster and SAN to support its mission but a serious SAN failure brought their entire network down for days.

## Results

- Mirrored systems include Exchange Server, database, web, reporting, content management, and Enterprise Blackberry Server.
- Replicates production data to centralized backup servers in real time.
- Performs server recoveries automatically or on-demand.
- Routine server maintenance is performed during normal business hours.

## Technologies

- Double-Take Availability
- Microsoft Windows
- Microsoft Exchange Server
- Enterprise Blackberry Server

## Business Challenge

MIS operates the UK's largest electronic point of purchase advertising network. Founded in 1999, the company has become a leader in the UK's digital point of purchase industry by combining the best attributes of a family business culture with the infrastructure of a modern IT focused company. With installations in many UK Post Offices, private hospitals and leisure facilities, the company helps up to 18,000 local businesses advertise on highly visible digital screens in a range of busy locations. Having recently opened offices in the Republic of Ireland and Australia, the company has a platform to take its class leading system to new markets.

With delivery of service to customers almost entirely dependent on IT, the company invested in an IBM server cluster and SAN to support employee productivity. When, in November 2004, software controlling the SAN corrupted the entire server and storage infrastructure at their Blackpool head office. Technicians were only able to correct the problem and restore operational ability at the end of the fourth working day. During this time, though the company's 60 employees presented for work and drew a salary, there was nothing that they could contribute to productivity. The company was unable to service its clients and was effectively closed for business.

Following the IT failure, Steve Corsbie, group IT manager at MIS recognized that immediate action was required to prevent any further unexpected productivity loss. Corsbie called in Alchemy Systems to implement an IT solution to modernize the company's business continuity program. Following an initial consultation, Alchemy suggested that single points of failure within the IT infrastructure should be removed and designed a network infrastructure utilizing fully duplicated IT products, including servers. Alchemy's network design required a solution for replicating data from production to backup servers, which would automatically initiate failover in the event of a continuity issue.



During the first quarter of 2005, MIS implemented a replication and failover product from one well-known IT vendor, however, the failover capability of the solution was difficult to implement and manage. Additionally, the solution required identical production and target server hardware, which proved impractical and expensive. After seven months of struggling with the implementation, MIS decided to replace the installation.

**Solution**

In late 2005, Alchemy Systems introduced Vision Solutions to MIS, as its solutions promised to offer the replication and failover capabilities that the organization needed. Additionally, Vision Solutions approach avoids the hardware synchronization issues present with the previous solution, as it does not require identical production and target hardware.

Wary after the failure of the first continuity implementation, MIS took Vision Solutions product on a three-month trial basis. Corsbie remembers the trial, “We started by pulling out the power and network cables on our production servers. Each time we attempted to bring down the system, the Vision’s product automatically failed-over to the backup server and presented users with a complete data set. This clearly showed us that, with Vision’s product, MIS’ IT infrastructure would continue to be available if there were to be a genuine continuity issue. After seven months of struggling with the previous system, adopting Double-Take Availability was a very easy decision to make.”

With all of Alchemy’s technicians fully certified Double-Take professionals, the implementation of Double-Take Availability at MIS was rapid, taking just a day and a half, and without problems. Ongoing updates and upgrades to the system have been similarly smooth. MIS now protects its Exchange, database, web, reporting, content management, and Enterprise Blackberry Server with Double-Take Availability.

MIS has discovered additional benefits of Double-Take Availability. Occasionally, and for no immediately apparent reason, the output of the company’s production servers slows down. Because Double-Take Availability’s failover technology has proved completely effective, MIS is comfortable with initiating a manual failover to the target server to investigate the problem on the production units. As a result the company’s technicians no longer have to schedule routine maintenance out of office hours.

The company has also been able to save hardware costs by investing more in production servers than the target machines. Because target servers are required only infrequently when an issue occurs, they need not provide such high levels of performance, being only a stopgap until the issue with the production servers is rectified.

MIS’ investment in the Double-Take Availability has been justified many times over, as Corsbie explains, “During 2006 we had three separate IT failures. In 2007, we’ve so far experienced two. In every instance, Double-Take has performed perfectly. Of our workforce of 60, 80% had absolutely no idea that there had been an issue. The remaining 20% received an on-screen message advising them that contact with the server had been lost and to restart their applications. This process takes them less than 90 seconds. From an IT management perspective we are extremely happy with these results, as is Dave Ravenscroft, our managing director.”



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- ◆ High Availability
- ◆ Disaster Recovery
- ◆ Systems and Data Management
- ◆