



“Our data is a critical part of our organization’s ability to support businesses in how they are developing skill sets for their employees. Double-Take provides us with a simple and effective disaster recovery platform for protecting that data.”

Fabian Brown, ICT Manager, merSETA

Business Profile

Company Name:
MerSETA

Headquarters:
Johannesburg, South Africa

Industry:
Education & Training

Business Environment:

- Provides grants and support for skills development within automobile and plastics manufacturing markets
- Supports access to training for over 600,000 workers in these industries
- Promotes sustainable growth across industry sectors

Vision Solutions Product:
Double-Take Availability

Implementation Team:
ATIO

Critical issue

MerSETA wanted to replace its existing disaster recovery strategy with an updated approach. This involved looking at data replication technologies that would better fit the organization’s present requirements, while coping with a very low amount of available bandwidth.

Results

- Double-Take Availability provides protection for the organization’s data and applications
- Ensures data can be replicated to second site, even with the limited amount of bandwidth available
- Protection for files ensures that no data is lost, even in the event of a disaster

Technologies

- Double-Take Availability
- Dell PowerEdge servers
- Microsoft Windows Server 2003 R2

Business Challenge

MerSETA is the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority. It is one of the 23 SETAs established through the South African Skills Development Act. Its role is to facilitate the sustainable development of skills and to accelerate growth in the manufacturing and related services sector. The organization supports businesses across South Africa in the auto manufacturing, motor retail and component manufacturing, tire manufacturing and plastics industries. Together the five sub-sectors comprise approximately 44 000 companies, with a workforce of approximately 600,000.

MerSETA plays a central role in making sure that the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) is fulfilled. It is responsible for paying grants, registering moderators and assessors, identifying scarce skills, accrediting training providers, monitoring the quality of training and implementing projects to close any potential skills gaps.

As part of its services and processes, IT plays a big role in the organization’s day-to-day activities. Fabian Brown, IT manager at merSETA, is responsible for the management of IT services and assets, as well as ensuring that the organization’s data is secure and protected.

“We had been using tape for backups as part of our disaster recovery strategy for some time, but we were facing a number of issues with this approach. The first was the management of the backups themselves: we worked on a weekly full backup, and incremental daily backups were also taken. However, making sure that the correct tapes were being used and that each tape was being used successfully was a big administration headache,” explained Brown. “We also had issues with the amount of time it would have taken to restore our systems to working order in the event of a failure.”



Working with his local IT service provider ATIO, Brown decided to look for alternatives to the situation. This involved evaluating different approaches to disaster recovery and moving data off-site. One of the biggest criteria for merSETA was around support for its Outlook archives. “When we were backing up to tape, users going into their mail archives and accessing PST files would cause these backups to fail. This led to additional management overhead for the IT team and represented an opportunity to lose data,” said Brown. “As part of our exploration of IT solutions on the market, we had to properly support Outlook and mail archives.”

Solution

ATIO recommended Double-Take Availability from Vision Solutions as a solution to protect merSETA’s data more effectively than tape. This was based on the requirement for replication of data without huge amounts of bandwidth being necessary, as well as replication being done at the byte level.

“The decision to go with Double-Take was actually an easy one – the team at ATIO has supported our IT requirements for so long that they know our needs extremely well. The Double-Take product was the only one that worked at both the level of granularity that we were looking for, as well as handling the low bandwidth conditions that are part of the network,” commented Brown.

ATIO assisted the merSETA IT team in implementing the Double-Take solution at one of the organization’s remote offices which is 100 kilometres away from the main site. “We were running a dedicated 768 kilobits/second line between the two offices as part of our network. When implementing the Double-Take solution, we were concerned that we would have to increase the number of lines that we had, but the approach that the Double-Take software takes around replication means that this additional cost was not necessary,” said Brown. “We still have our HTTP, file and VoIP traffic on this line, and the data replication traffic sits alongside this. We have a limit imposed so that no additional replication traffic goes over the wire and affects our day-to-day activities. The installation itself was completed in one day, and it has been protecting our systems effectively ever since.”

MerSETA is currently protecting its main file server with Double-Take, ensuring that the company’s data is protected against any failure event. This includes protecting around 600GB of information and files. “With the tape based backup approach that we had in place previously, it would have taken us around two days to recover our IT systems. With Double-Take, we can simply switch users over to the second server at our remote location, and they can carry on working as normal. Since we installed Double-Take, we have suffered no data loss or corruption,” commented Brown. “We continue to test our DR strategy every month, to check that everything is still being protected properly. We have also had a couple of false alarms where we thought that a disaster might be occurring – thanks to Double-Take, users did not see any impact on their productivity.”



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