



“We had a hardware failure up at our Robesonia site. The decision was made to fail over to our York site. The failover went smoothly and we operated for a week at our York site. EchoStream allowed us to continue our mission critical business until repairs were made at our Robesonia site.”

Ken McFeaters, director, systems and networking, AWI

Business Profile

Company Name:
Associated Wholesalers, Inc.

Headquarters:
Robesonia, Pennsylvania, USA

Industry:
Food Wholesaling and Distribution

Business Size:
Associated Wholesalers Inc. (AWI) is the largest wholesale cooperative operating in the Food Trade News area. The company's primary distribution center is based in Robesonia, PA and it also operates a secondary facility in York, PA. AWI serviced 966 retail stores and rang up sales of \$1.2 billion.

Business Environment:

- Food wholesaling and distribution
- 14-acre distribution center
- Distributes food products
- Operates 24 x 7

Implementation Team:

- Vision Solutions
- Associated Wholesalers

Vision Solutions Products:

- EchoStream for AIX
- EchoCluster for AIX

Critical Issue

Associated Wholesalers, Inc. (AWI) operates 24x7 in a competitive industry. If it can't deliver products to its customers, other wholesalers stand ready, willing and eager to fill that gap.

The company depends on logistics software from Retalix to fill orders from its warehouses, load its trucks and get those trucks on the road. If that software were unavailable, many of the company's operations would have to stop, threatening AWI's ability to serve customers. Clearly, lengthy data and application outages are not an option for AWI.

Results

- AWI now has a comprehensive disaster recovery and high availability solution that is simple to administer and use.
- All lengthy planned and unplanned outages can be avoided.
- Vision provides thorough, around-the-clock support to meet the needs of AWI's 24x7 operations.
- EchoStream and EchoCluster require minimal day-to-day management.

Technologies

- EchoStream™ for AIX®
- EchoCluster™ for AIX
- AIX
- Retalix logistics software
- 3 x IBM Power 520 Servers – (two clustered at primary site, one offsite backup)
- IBM SAN

Business Challenge

Business never stops at AWI. Around the clock, personnel at its distribution center load trucks and ship goods to customers. This activity is dependent on AIX-based logistics software from Retalix. If the server running the Retalix software is unavailable or the data in the system is destroyed, many operations would stop until the server and/or data is brought back on line.

Food wholesaling is a competitive business. AWI's customers must keep their shelves stocked to meet the needs of their own customers. If AWI can't deliver the goods to its customers, someone else will.

Beyond the threat to customer loyalty, unavailable systems and data would translate into considerable lost productivity. Typically, between 150 and 200 employees are logged into AWI's logistics application during the day. This does not include people responsible for picking and packing orders in the distribution centers. These employees use a wireless voice recognition and simulation application that is dependent on the logistics application. Furthermore, the Retalix application also interfaces with AWI's order and billing systems.

Because of the heavy dependence on the logistics application, if it is unavailable many employees would be idled or, at best, their productivity would be severely curtailed until the system came back online.

“It [the Retalix logistics application] is what runs the company,” confirmed Sheri Kaufman, AWI network manager.



Solution

AWI chose EchoStream and EchoCluster, from Vision Solutions, to ensure that its data and applications are always available, no matter what. The company had used another high availability product in the past, but that product was difficult to use and more costly than the solution from Vision.

Beyond reliability and assured availability, AWI wanted a disaster recovery and high availability solution that is easy to use and facilitates rapid failovers to a backup system, should the need arise.

AWI got what it was looking for with EchoCluster for AIX and EchoStream for AIX.

With continuous self-monitoring and automated failover, the high availability capabilities of EchoCluster for AIX ensure that business-critical applications stay protected, available and productive.

AWI uses EchoCluster to maintain a tightly couple cluster of two AIX-based servers in the company's Robesonia, Pennsylvania corporate office. Should the primary system become unavailable for any reason, the backup system remains ready to immediately take over operations.

Clearly, a cluster of two systems in the same facility will not protect against downtime due to a disaster that shuts down the entire data center or due to a hardware or software failure that affects the whole cluster. To safeguard against these threats, AWI maintains a third AIX-based IBM Power 520 system in another facility in York, Pennsylvania, which is about 50 miles from Robesonia.

AWI uses EchoStream for AIX to replicate data in real-time between the Robesonia and York facilities. EchoStream's failover capabilities allow the company to rapidly switchover to the backup facility and recover data.

EchoStream for AIX has already paid for itself at AWI. After a hardware failure in Robesonia, the company decided to failover to the system in York. The failover went smoothly and AWI ran its operations on the York system for about a week. Had it waited for the Robesonia hardware to come back online, AWI estimated that it would have been down for a minimum of four to five additional hours, which would have been extremely costly for the company.

Product support is another Vision Solutions advantage. According to Ted Fiedler, UNIX administrator at AWI, "Support has been excellent. Any time I have a question I usually just send them an email and I get a quick answer. And, if I need it, I can get people on the phone at 1:00 a.m."

Ken McFeaters, director, systems and networking at AWI, added, "And that's really important in a 24 x 7 operation because we can't afford to be down. "

Further to Fiedler's comments on product support from Vision, McFeaters said, "I've had the same relationship with the Vision sales people. They are always very helpful in getting done the things we need done. That's definitely a plus in today's environment."

The bottom line is that EchoStream and EchoCluster, "provide the backup and recovery software we must have," declared McFeaters. "That's what they are there for. And they seem do that very well."



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