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Russell Erickson, System Administrator, Nicholas & Company

Business Profile

Company name:
Nicholas & Company

Headquarters:
Salt Lake City, Utah (USA)

Industry:
Foodservice Distribution

Employees:
Approximately 500

Business Environment:

- Founded in 1939, now a leading broadline foodservice distributor
- Customers range from "mom and pop" eateries to major restaurant chains across the U.S.
- 24/7 operations at the company's 300,000 square-foot warehouse
- As many as 60,000 cases of food delivered each day

Implementation Team:
In-house IT staff at Nicholas & Company

Vision Solutions Product:
iTERA HA for i5/OS

Critical Issue

On-time delivery is a vital competitive issue in the foodservice industry, and Nicholas & Company stakes its reputation on meeting its customers' needs. Continuous availability of technology including a warehouse management system is key to the company's continued success, so a high availability solution is a fundamental business requirement.

Results

- Systems vital to customer service are up continuously.
- The backup window has been eliminated.
- Role-swapping is smooth, fast, and easy.
- Security and flexibility for development with a test environment on the backup server.
- Proven foundation for future expansion of disaster recovery capabilities.

Technologies

- iTERA™ HA for i5/OS®
- IBM® System i™ Model 525 production server
- System i 525 CBU edition backup server
- In-house developed warehouse management application and 3rd-party sales application

Business Challenge

As a broadline foodservice distributor, Nicholas & Company delivers food and other products to a wide range of customers, from the smallest restaurants to national fast-food chains. Investments in technology have helped Nicholas & Company continue to meet a key customer demand in this highly competitive industry: on-time delivery.

Nicholas & Company's sales applications and warehouse management system run on IBM System i servers at the company headquarters in Salt Lake City. To protect its technology investments and maintain its reputation for excellent service, Nicholas & Company began to look for a high-availability solution.

"Nicholas & Company is the largest broadline distributor in the U.S. that operates out of a single warehouse," explained Russell Erickson, System Administrator, Nicholas & Company. "With receiving during the day and order picking at night, we can't afford downtime."

Plans to move the company's main corporate Web site, email, and voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) system to its in-house servers made high availability even more essential at Nicholas & Company.

"The company was looking for a reliable way to keep its systems up continuously, move the backup window off the main server, and have some disaster recovery capabilities in the future," said Erickson.



Solution

A long-time user of IBM hardware, Nicholas & Company decided to upgrade its servers, move to the V5R4 release of the i5/OS operating system, and install iTERA HA for i5/OS from Vision Solutions.

The installation of iTERA HA was completed by Erickson, based on his experience with the Vision Solutions product. "It went very well, and there were no problems," he said. "I had used iTERA HA for about five years at another company, and I've been very impressed with the product itself and the support staff behind it," he added.

The company replaced its IBM System i Model 820 server with a new Model 525 and bought a 525 CBU edition as a backup server. Erickson used iTera HA for i5/OS to move to the new hardware via role-swap, and was pleased with the speed of this switchover. "It was very easy to do the migration. There were no problems, and we were covered the whole time," said Erickson.

"Overall, you just don't need to worry about iTera HA for i5/OS: it's easy to manage thanks to a lot of built-in fail-safes, audits and other features," stated Erickson. "We plan to do a couple of role-swaps every year," he added.

Eliminating downtime has been one of the major benefits of iTERA HA for i5/OS. "We used to back up and IPL overnight on Saturdays for about six hours, and that has been eliminated," said Erickson. "Using iTERA HA, we are up 24/7, and that will be even more important when we bring our website and email in house," he emphasized.

Another benefit is that development is easier and safer to do in a test environment on the backup rather than on the primary server. "Looking ahead, iTERA HA will also help when we expand: we'll move our CBU edition server to a separate location, giving us true disaster recovery protection," Erickson explained.

Once the company is hosting its email, VoIP and web sites in-house, their "eggs will be in one basket," according to Erickson. "With iTERA HA, we'll know that the basket won't break. In terms of risk and ROI, it's definitely worth the price of the software and install to have the peace of mind that our systems will be available to meet our needs and our customers'," concluded Erickson.



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