



"It was important to us that MIMIX has a specialized solution for SAP®. Because of this customization, MIMIX automates many of the things that need to be done in the SAP environment."

Sharon Gunia, CIO, Ball Horticultural Company

Business Profile

Company Name:
Ball Horticultural Company

Location:
West Chicago, Illinois (USA)

Industry:
Breeding, production, and wholesale distribution of ornamental plants and seeds

Employees:
More than 3,000 worldwide

Business Environment:

- Private firm founded in 1905 by George J. Ball and run by three generations of the Ball family
- A world leader in the development, production and marketing of floriculture crops
- Facilities in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia
- Ball's seeds and live products are sold exclusively to professional growers

Vision Solutions Product:
MIMIX HA

Critical Issue

With operations that span 22 countries and six continents, Ball Horticultural Company is truly a business that never sleeps. Ball's SAP data and applications must be available all of the time for Ball's worldwide employees and systems must be up to accommodate online orders. With no "off hours" to perform regular system and database maintenance, Ball needed a robust HA environment to eliminate planned and unplanned downtime.

Results

- Vital SAP data and applications are online continuously, even during backups
- In Ball's three-tier SAP environment, switching between the primary and backup systems is transparent, with no interruption to business applications
- Switches for operating system upgrades that had taken a full weekend of downtime are performed with MIMIX in just minutes
- Disk space saved by converting from mirroring to RAID
- Cost savings achieved by deferring the purchase of new disks

Technologies

- MIMIX® HA from Vision Solutions
- SAP ERP
- Three IBM Power Systems servers

Business Challenge

In business over a century, Ball Horticultural Company is now a global leader in floriculture. The company plays a major role in plant and seed research and owns the largest horticultural supplier in North America. Ball's strategic acquisitions, joint ventures, and startups have solidified the company's worldwide presence and Ball continues to grow.

Like any prudent organization, Ball Horticultural Company backs up its data to ensure that it will be able to recover its business should a disaster strike. In the past, this nightly task required stopping the company's vital SAP applications for about half an hour. However, when Ball extended its operations beyond North America and began to accept online orders 24 hours a day, even this relatively short period of downtime was no longer acceptable.

Ball also experienced a reminder of the need for a hot-backup system. Unexpectedly, the company lost two of its mirrored disk drives simultaneously, shutting down Ball's business systems for 96 hours.

Clearly, Ball needed a way to avoid both planned and unplanned downtime, and the company turned to MIMIX HA from Vision Solutions.



Solution

When Ball evaluated the high availability alternatives in the marketplace, the SAP-specialized version of MIMIX tipped the scales. Ball chose MIMIX as the ideal solution to eliminate planned and unplanned downtime and help automate many tasks in the SAP environment.

“The MIMIX implementation went very well,” said Doreen Anderson, SAP Basis Manager, Ball Horticultural Company. “There were three scheduled visits, with very well defined agendas, and the project remained right on track.”

MIMIX HA accommodates all SAP architectures including two-tier, three-tier, and multiple System IDs (SIDs). With MIMIX in place, Ball Horticultural Company operates in a three-tier SAP environment running on three IBM Power Systems servers: a primary database server, a hot-backup database server, and an application server that front-ends the primary database server.

MIMIX is designed to provide SAP ERP users with advanced information availability functionality. If access to a primary system is lost, due to planned maintenance or an unexpected event, MIMIX can seamlessly and automatically switch operations to a MIMIX-managed hot-backup system on which up-to-date data and applications reside. The backup system can then assume full responsibility for the operation of the SAP environment.

Because MIMIX utilizes a highly structured, automated role swap process, switching is handled so smoothly that it's effectively transparent to end users. In Ball's SAP environment, switching between the primary and backup systems can occur without any interruption to the business applications.

When Ball needed to upgrade its IBM i operating system, the company first performed the upgrade on the backup server. For a few weeks the primary and backup servers were running different versions of the operating system, but this was no problem. MIMIX continued to replicate data and objects between the two faultlessly. When it was ready to upgrade the primary server's operating system, Ball switched users to the backup. After completing the upgrade, it switched users back. The whole upgrade process was painless.

Instead of the full weekend of downtime that Ball used to experience when upgrading its operating system, with MIMIX, each switch between the two servers was accomplished in just five to ten minutes.

In addition to providing a robust high availability environment, MIMIX also solves the data-backup downtime issue for Ball. Because it is always up-to-date with the production server data, tape backups can now be performed using the hot-backup system. Production applications and data are unaffected by the process.

Ball's confidence in its backup system and switching capabilities also provided an opportunity to control data-storage costs. Faced with a need to buy additional disks as its requirements increased, the company realized that since MIMIX provides a continuously up-to-date backup copy of all data and objects, it no longer needed to mirror disks on both primary and backup servers.

Ball was able to save disk space by converting from mirroring to RAID and was able to defer the purchase of new disks. And once again, thanks to MIMIX, the company was able to switch users to the hot-backup system while it performed the conversion, making this process as painless as the operating system upgrade.

To meet its worldwide business obligations, Ball's SAP ERP data and applications must be available all of the time. Even in an uncertain world where things can occasionally go wrong and where systems require regular maintenance, MIMIX makes this possible.



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