

Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit

The Health Unit needed to provide continuous and secure access to online medical services and also needed to safeguard citizens' health information held in its medical centers. With PlateSpin Forge®, the Health Unit created a centralized disaster recovery solution for its entire heterogeneous server landscape, guaranteeing data protection and reducing its recovery point objective from days to 20 minutes.



Overview

The Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit provides a comprehensive range of health information, programs and services to a population of approximately 150,000 people in its 7,000 km² catchment area, located between Toronto and Ottawa, Canada.

The Health Unit's mission is to enable people in Hastings and Prince Edward counties to achieve and maintain optimal health through health protection and promotion, as well as disease and injury prevention.

“PlateSpin Forge has given us total peace of mind thanks to its effectiveness, ease of use and reliability!”

TOM LOCKHART

IT Systems Manager
Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit

Challenge

As a governmental organization serving thousands of citizens every day, the Health Unit needs to ensure its medical services—increasingly based on online applications—are easily accessible and available at all times. Furthermore, to ensure top-quality health assistance and meet regulatory requirements, the organization must protect highly confidential medical data against loss.

For the Health Unit, guaranteeing critical application availability and protecting sensitive data by ensuring that systems can be fully and quickly restored in the event of failure or disaster is a top priority.

If sensitive medical information were unavailable because of system outage or data loss, the Health Unit would face very serious regulatory consequences. Even worse, it could potentially lead to incorrect diagnosis or mis-treatment. With such high stakes, the Health Unit wanted to ensure that it had a rock-solid disaster recovery (DR) solution in place.

Health Unit



Hastings & Prince Edward Counties

At a Glance

■ Industry

Healthcare

■ Location

Ottawa, Canada

■ Challenge

The Health Unit needs to ensure its medical services are easily accessible and available at all times.

■ Solution

Use PlateSpin Forge to provide comprehensive protection for a combination of 20 virtual and physical servers, running a variety of operating systems and applications.

■ Results

- + Reduced RPO from one day to 20 minutes
- + Reduced RTO to less than one hour
- + Enabled a very simple failback in two real disaster recovery scenarios

Customer Success Story

Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit

Tom Lockhart, IT systems manager at the Health Unit, said, “While our day-to-day data protection and recovery activities worked well, what we were lacking was a proper, fully integrated disaster DR solution—which can be a real challenge for a public organization like ours due to the typical cost and complexity.

“We were not fully confident that we could guarantee timely recovery from a scenario where part of our infrastructure or an entire server went down.

“Our old recovery point objective [RPO] was around one to two days, and our recovery time objective [RTO] was between three and four days. For core services in particular, these metrics were unacceptable, and we really needed to do something to improve the situation.”

Solution

Seeking a solution that would allow the organization to recover core services quickly, the Health Unit soon homed in on PlateSpin Forge from Micro Focus®.

“I didn’t want to invest in a lot of new infrastructure, and most importantly, I needed something that would come fully configured, be easy to get up and running quickly, and that would be easy for me to support afterwards,” said Lockhart.

“I chose the PlateSpin Forge appliance because it was one of the only solutions that met all of these requirements right out of the

box—it came with the hypervisor and all supporting services preconfigured. For most of the other solutions, I was going to have to procure hardware and software separately and build my own DR solution.”

With Micro Focus acting a single source of support, the Health Unit has just one number to call for both hardware-and software-related inquiries and can rest assured that any questions or issues will be resolved rapidly.

“Having just a single vendor to deal with when it comes to troubleshooting or service requests massively simplifies support,” said Lockhart.

“With solutions that combine separate hardware and software products, one of the worst things that can happen is that if something goes wrong, you might have different vendors pointing fingers at each other instead of focusing on fixing the problem. With Micro Focus, we get a cohesive solution, shipped preconfigured, and one point of contact for any issues—this tight integration at all levels really was the deciding factor for us.”

PlateSpin Forge combines hardware and software in a single, cost-effective appliance, making the solution very easy to configure and deploy.

“PlateSpin Forge ticked all the boxes: It is cost-effective, compatible with our virtualized environment, and incredibly easy to set up and use,” said Lockhart. “We took it out of the box, we got it cabled, we got it powered on, and in just

about half an hour we had our first server replicated and protected. It could not have been a more simple process.”

The Health Unit uses PlateSpin Forge to provide comprehensive protection for a combination of 20 virtual and physical servers, running a variety of operating systems and applications.

The solution makes scheduled incremental backup of the server workloads—both virtualized and unvirtualized—and in the event of a failure on the source infrastructure enables the Health Unit to restart them, individually or as a group.

Recovered workloads run virtualized on the PlateSpin Forge appliance, and the Health Unit can fail them back seamlessly to replacement hardware, either as virtual machines or full physical installs.

A key selling point for the PlateSpin® solution is its ability to run quick and non-disruptive tests.

“Part of our plan was to create a disaster recovery environment and make sure that it is replicating correctly,” said Lockhart.

“PlateSpin Forge enables us to do all of this with unbelievable ease and at any time. We just select the workloads we want to test and set them to replicate with PlateSpin Forge, and that’s it. The solution even sends emails every morning, letting us know that the workloads have been replicated successfully.”

Results

With the PlateSpin Forge appliance in place, the Health Unit can promptly restore access to online medical information, applications and services for both staff and patients in the case of a sudden system outage. The organization has slashed its recovery point and recovery time objectives.

"Installing PlateSpin Forge has given us total peace of mind," said Lockhart. "Our RPO is down to 20 minutes from perhaps one or two days in the past, and our RTO is less than one hour, compared to a target of three or four days in the past, which is incredibly impressive."

A key factor in guaranteeing effective, timely disaster recovery lies in carefully balancing the amount of time spent troubleshooting before failing over to the disaster recovery environment.

The less confident an organization is in its disaster recovery solution, the more time it is likely to spend trying to restart its production servers.

With PlateSpin Forge guaranteeing seamless, secure disaster recovery, the Health Unit can

minimize the time spent troubleshooting and fail over to backup systems quickly, ensuring a rapid RTO.

"The PlateSpin solution has allowed us to really rethink our RTO," said Lockhart. "When a service outage occurs, you typically have to consider how much time you want to invest in troubleshooting the problem on the production server before failing over to the DR environment.

"With PlateSpin Forge, those considerations don't even come into question. We can try a few basic fixes on the failed production systems, and if they don't work, it is very quick and easy to fail over to the PlateSpin environment.

"Once our core services are safely up and running in the backup environment, we can take all the time we need to fix the production servers while business continues as usual."

PlateSpin Forge has already proven itself in real disaster recovery scenarios, allowing the Health Unit to recover critical workloads quickly and easily following a failure.

"The thing about a DR environment is that you never know if it's actually going to work until the first time you have to use it," said Lockhart. "And it has to work a hundred percent of the time, or you're in trouble. In the two times we've had to use it to recover from a real failure, PlateSpin Forge worked perfectly and enabled a very simple failback after we remediated the production situation."

The Health Unit now has an effective, reliable and easy-to-use disaster recovery solution, fully integrated with its legacy backup and data protection systems.

"With the PlateSpin Forge appliance from Micro Focus, we have full confidence we can bring our core applications back up within one hour in the event of an outage," said Lockhart.

"We could not be more pleased with PlateSpin Forge—it is an effective, easy to use and, most importantly, totally reliable DR solution. It gives us complete peace of mind and provides a safety net against disaster."

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