

case study



St. Dominic's Sixth Form College

Further education with outstanding IT infrastructure

Background

At the core of this vibrant sixth form college, St. Dominic's have a state-of-the-art IT infrastructure run by an IT department of five professionals. They manage the network itself; management information systems; and information learning technology (ILT) systems, the latter of which are of great importance to educational establishments such as St. Dominic's. The college worked with Eurodata, with whom they had built up a five year relationship, to develop their cutting-edge IT infrastructure. The latest collaboration involved Eurodata's experienced consultants designing and implementing a Storage Area Network (SAN), and then Disaster Recovery solution, using Hewlett-Packard (HP) StorageWorks and Mirroring technology, to create a state-of-the-art disaster recovery solution to protect the college's critical data.

The Challenge

Like all educational establishments, St. Dominic's have to undergo regular Government Ofsted inspections, with increasingly more data being requested. This means that the College needs to show that their education is of a high standard, and that their IT infrastructure supports learning in every aspect. A successful Ofsted report enables St. Dominic's to secure further

government funding, and such reports are based on specific information that the college can provide; which not only details student numbers, but also what they are learning. This has made a strong infrastructure, which can store, manage and retrieve data efficiently, of great importance to St. Dominic's, said Chris Rosser, Director of Information Services at St. Dominic's. He added that as students produce more and more documents, with some of them as large as 300 pages including hefty images, the IT infrastructure must be able to cope. A good report from Ofsted Inspectors, particularly regarding the IT infrastructure, will also help the college attract more students, who can be sure of using the latest technology. Chris' confidence had grown as Eurodata successfully completed a number of projects, initially implementing a thin-client Citrix MetaFrame system, to extend the legacy systems so staff could work from home and gain direct access to the network. Eurodata also replaced an infrastructure solution from Research Machines, an IT supplier for the education sector, which the college was finding restrictive. Over time, the infrastructure has grown to incorporate 250 Windows desktops and 100 wireless-enabled notebooks connected to the network. Eurodata also reconfigured the IP infrastructure to offer greater security. Now, the network and applications can be accessed by staff and students from home 24-hours a day.

Company

St. Dominic's Sixth Form College (St. Dominic's) have been a sixth form college since 1979 and pride themselves on being a place of academic excellence, with their historical tradition stretching back for a hundred years. St. Dominic's was set up by the Catholic Dominican Order, who established a school there in 1878.

About the Solution

The HP StorageWorks Modular Smart Array 1000 (MSA1000) is a 2 Gb Fibre Channel storage system for the entry-level to midrange storage area network (SAN). It provides a low-cost, scalable, high performance storage consolidation system with investment protection. It is designed to reduce the complexity and risk of SAN deployments.

"The new Storage and Disaster Recovery solution that Eurodata designed and built gives better performance, and students and staff are confident to use it, and get the best out of it."

*Chris Rosser
Director Information Services
St. Dominic's Sixth Form College.*



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This is thanks to an intranet solution called VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) available round the clock. This provides learning material resources, forums, IRC, and email. Although Chris was satisfied with the network, he needed to take the IT infrastructure forward, to gain control of the college's storage, which was now becoming out of hand. Documents were growing at a massive rate, and the storage situation needed immediate attention as the student population produced more image-based course work. St. Dominic's needed a central point of administration, with a robust and scalable solution and therefore turned to Eurodata for guidance.

The Solution

Eurodata designed a SAN solution based on HP's MSA 1000 Tape Storage Server, which had a blisteringly fast dedicated fibre channel link, to ensure that data could be stored and retrieved quickly. The HP SAN had a Windows Server 2003 cluster server linked to it which held student user accounts, as well as two additional servers attached for other functions. The results were dramatic and immediate, with the college making efficiency gains from storing all of their students' work on the system and managing the storage centrally. It replaced a system whereby work was stored across a series of file and application servers and different storage media, which had become unmanageable. "The competent Eurodata rapidly installed the SAN and it was ready, up and running in three days," said Chris Rosser.

After the successful SAN project, the College Governors realised that they were in need of a disaster recovery solution, to protect the critical financial information, and student records, as well as the infrastructure and user storage accounts.

St. Dominic's selected one which best suited their business and technical needs resulting in Eurodata utilising HP Mirroring technology to mirror their mission critical components in a second campus building. Eurodata then used mirroring with a second SAN identical to the first system. The final IT infrastructure was based on eight servers, including two Windows Server 2003 cluster servers, a Windows NT4.0 server, and Disaster Recovery servers, with Veritas software for backup, and Capita's Unit-e student management software system. "Eurodata's SAN Storage solution backs up data every hour, using online backup through fibre channel links, so if someone loses a file, the system can return to the previous hour to retrieve it," said Chris Rosser.

The Benefits

With the IT infrastructure that Eurodata designed and built for St. Dominic's, the college recently scored very highly at its latest Government Ofsted report, which specifically mentioned the excellent IT infrastructure. "We have done extremely well at the recent Ofsted inspection, right across the board, including the leadership and management Category. IT has helped because the systems were reliable during the inspection," said Chris Rosser.

Project Integrator

Established in 1990, Eurodata is a privately owned independent specialist IT company dedicated to providing solutions to the mid market. Employing around 120 people across 4 locations (three in London and one in Wales), Eurodata cost-effectively plans, executes and delivers high-quality services across four key areas; Managed Services, Professional Services, Distribution Services and TeamEuro. Partnering with such organisations as Microsoft, HP, Whale and IBM we are able to provide customers the ability to easily take advantage of today's latest technologies which in the past have only been available to large organisations. Our honest and open approach allows us to effectively provide flexible, scalable solutions; Eurodata's area of excellence focuses on the desktop, server and network space covering storage and archiving, network and end point security.

The SAN solution has made their storage manageable, and scalable with a central point of control, and easy configuration, which has produced efficiency gains for Chris's IT department, and saved on storage costs. Chris added, "It has made sure we have enough storage available, and helpdesk calls have dropped as users have been faced with less restrictions." The HP Mirrored Disaster Recovery solution has given the college the ability to recover systems immediately. "We have become very dependent on our systems, and aimed for the capacity to recover our mission critical systems and data within two days. We actually achieved much more than that with the new solution, because it can take over instantly and seamlessly in the event of a fire," said Chris Rosser.

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