COMPANY PROFILE

Panda Restaurant Group, Inc. (PRG) is the largest and fastest growing Asian restaurant company in the nation. Since 1973, when Founder and Chairman Andrew Cherng opened his first Panda Inn restaurant, the company has maintained a deep commitment to guest satisfaction and focus on employee development. Dedication to its core values has helped PRG grow to over 1,300 stores, with close to 18,000 associates in 38 states and Puerto Rico.

PRG owns every one of its 1,300 stores. Data from each of the company's locations is fed back to its headquarters in Rosemead, California, where it's used for everything from food orders to training. With the heartbeat of the company in Rosemead, the company needed a simple, cost-effective disaster recovery (DR) solution that could enable business continuity and help the company consistently deliver on its promise to provide great service.

COMPANY

The largest and fastest growing Asian restaurant company in the U.S., with over 1,300 stores throughout 38 states and Puerto Rico.

CHALLENGE

Implement a DR solution that could meet the demands of rapid data growth in a mixed environment of physical and virtual servers.

SOLUTION DETAILS

Combine NetApp Syncsort Integrated Backup (NSB) software; NetApp® SnapMirror® and SnapVault®; NetApp OnCommand™; and NetApp FAS3200 series storage. Frontend Hitachi production storage with a NetApp V6280 before moving all storage to NetApp in early 2013.

RESULTS

▶ Freed IT personnel by cutting time spent on backups by 87%

▶ Cut backup windows in half while doubling number of systems

▶ Saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in software and storage costs

▶ Implemented a highly scalable disaster recovery plan

THE CHALLENGE

When Senior Network Administrator Daniel Mayo joined PRG in 2010, the company was backing up all of its 40TB of data weekly to tape. "Backup was pretty much a full-time position. It was my primary responsibility for a few months," explains Mayo.

PRG's mixed environment of physical and virtual servers posed a serious challenge for the 50-person IT department. Recovery of a single file took hours. A single weekly backup could take anywhere from 28 to 34 hours. With the company experiencing explosive growth, Mayo knew he needed a scalable solution that could handle the complexity of PRG's environment.

The company began working with a consulting firm to develop a business and technical plan to replicate data to PRG's DR site in Phoenix, Arizona, but it soon hit a roadblock. The PRG IT team did not feel that the replication software recommended by the consultant was a viable option. The team needed a solution it could feel confident about. And it needed it fast. When Mayo first contacted Zumasys, it was October and the solution needed to be up and running by the end of the year. PRG had less than three months to achieve their goal.

THE SOLUTION

Zumasys understood the challenges presented by PRG's mixed environment and worked with PRG to design and implement a unified solution that combines NetApp Syncsort Integrated Backup (NSB) software, NetApp SnapMirror, and NetApp storage systems at their production facility in Rosemead and DR site in Phoenix.

NSB allows PRG to back up its virtual and physical systems to the same backup target and use the same restore methods through a single client agent. "We're a pretty small shop," says Mayo, "so I'm always looking for ways to consolidate and unify solutions. Syncsort and NetApp did that for us."

The software also allows PRG to easy failover physical servers to its DR site, which it simply could not have done using its previous tape archiving solution. SnapMirror's low-bandwidth replication enables Mayo to schedule nightly updates to the DR site for all 200 systems. "There's just no other software that would have provided that solution for us," says Mayo.

Because NSB utilizes NetApp Snapshot™ and SnapVault technologies, backups are extremely space efficient, allowing PRG to keep more backups closer to production and further drive down restore times. "A baseline of the source server is taken one time, and from then on NSB only needs to transfer the delta changes from the previous backup," explains Zumasys Professional Services Manager Andy Takacs. "Combined with the fact that these incremental backups are done at the block level, you are talking about a massive reduction in storage requirements."

PRG has established a support contract with Zumasys that includes monthly health checks on all systems installed and supported by Zumasys, including NetApp and Citrix, and is now strengthening that partnership by jointly building an enterprise-level virtual infrastructure.

"We've partnered with Zumasys on a lot of great projects, and I can say hands down that they're the best technicians and engineers that we've worked with," adds Mayo. "It just makes sense for us to engage them in the design and implementation of our virtual environment."

RESULTS

Having moved 95% of its systems to NSB, PRG has almost eliminated its dependence on tape, cutting its backup window in half while doubling the size of its environment. Previously, it could take up to 36 hours to back up 80 systems. Today it takes around 18 hours for over 200 systems. "Given how much we've grown, if we had not changed to NSB and NetApp, our backup window would certainly be more than 48 hours today," says Mayo.

PRG now protects around 60TB of data, which it replicates on an hourly basis to the DR site in Phoenix using SnapMirror. Administrative time spent managing backups has dropped from 30 hours per week to around 4 hours per week, freeing IT staff to work on more strategic projects.

Using a combination of NSB and NetApp FlexVol® and SnapVault technologies, PRG has cut the time to restore systems from days to minutes and has gained control over the level of granularity of its restores. With PRG's previous tape solution, it could take up to two days just to requisition the tapes from off-site storage. Today, using instant availability mapping, PRG is able to access a snapshot taken within the last 30 days and make that data available in less 15 minutes.

Mayo estimates that the company has saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in software and storage costs alone by implementing the solution from Zumasys. The time saved on every-day maintenance administration—nearly one full-time employee—adds an additional cost benefit that PRG never expected.

With a consolidated disaster recovery solution in place, Mayo is already working with Zumasys to explore other ways to increase the value of IT to the organization. PRG recently engaged Zumasys in a project to frontend its Hitachi storage with a NetApp V6280, allowing PRG to expand the capabilities of its current Hitachi environment as it prepares to move to NetApp FAS6200 series storage in early 2013. Explains Mayo, "We're choosing NetApp as our next-level production storage because not only is it easy to manage, it also enables us to track performance metrics online. We're a small shop, so from a strategic perspective, being able to improve our performance is really invaluable to us."

PRG and Zumasys share pride in building relationships and developing strategic partner-ships, which is reflected in their ongoing collaboration. "We have a fantastic relationship with Zumasys, and we don't get that with every vendor," explains Mayo. "Every time we interact with Zumasys it results in fantastic service, and it is definitely something we will be cultivating over the next few years." ■