StoneFly Networks Success Story

Life Care Assurance

StoneFly Networks' IP SAN Delivers Long-Term Benefits to LifeCare Assurance

Leading third-party insurance administrator consolidates mass storage while lowering overall management efforts by more than 90 percent

Founded in 1988 and headquartered in Woodland Hills, CA, LifeCare Assurance employs 250 professionals and supports more than 90,000 agents nationwide with a variety of underwriting, policy issue, claims and policy-holder services. According to the company, total premium production continues to grow at 46 percent per year and is expected to reach $240 million in 2003.

LifeCare Assurance's IT department focuses on scalable and economical best-of-class solutions to meet the company's expanding business requirements. "We're not afraid to try new technologies if they can provide maximum functionality at the best price," says Jim Rogers, assistant vice president of technical infrastructure. "LifeCare Assurance operates as an extension of our partners' home offices, so we need to be highly efficient, flexible and reliable."

The network had grown so quickly that it was increasingly difficult to monitor the capacity and stability of 15 different disk subsystems.
"Our direct-attached storage method became almost impossible to manage because it took too long to troubleshoot problems and anticipate capacity needs," explained Mike Wolf, manager of technical services for LifeCare Assurance. "We had network bottlenecks and our practice of 'throwing' more hard drives at the problem wasn't working." As a result, users complained the network was slow to download files.

Consolidating Mass Storage
The LifeCare Assurance IT team researched a variety of storage alternatives and sought input from Starnet Data Design, a network integration firm that specializes in data storage management, network security, VoIP and wireless networking.
The collective team weighed cost, functionality, open

Industry/Market:

- *Long Term Care Insurance*

Challenges:

- *Unmanageable direct-attached storage*
- *Slow file downloads and access*
- *Need for open, scalable, cost-effective solution*
- *Fibre Channel SANs and NAS too costly & complex*

Solution:

- *StoneFly Networks Storage Concentrator i1500, Nexsan ATABoy2 Storage Array, 3Com Gigabit Ethernet Switch, Intel PRO/1000 T IP Storage Adapters*

Benefits:

- *$75,000 in equipment savings*
- *No training or downtime*
- *90% time savings in administration*
- *Faster file downloads*
- *Architecture supports business expansion*

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standards, ease of implementation and centralized storage management. Both Fibre Channel Storage Area Network (SAN) and Network Attached Storage (NAS) technologies were considered. In both cases there were concerns about cost and complexity.

As part of its research, Starnet Data Design saw a demo of StoneFly Networks' Storage Concentrator i1500, the first iSCSI product on the market to enable a new type of SAN utilizing existing Ethernet infrastructure and Internet Protocol (IP SAN). "Since we were familiar with IP and SCSI, we figured that an IP SAN could be added to the existing network more easily than other technologies," said Steve Marks, president of Starnet Data Design. "The StoneFly Storage Concentrator met all our criteria including block-level support and centralized storage management at a much better price point than anything else."

Centralized storage management was a key advantage. "Management of our direct-attached storage had become such a problem, we almost hired someone just to monitor our storage," notes Wolf. One of the benefits of the StoneFly Storage Concentrator was that LifeCare Assurance could access and administer changes from any browser to save time and alleviate management headaches.

By performing a cost comparison, the price of Fibre Channel SANs was determined to be anywhere from 10 to 20 times more expensive than the StoneFly IP SAN while a comparable NAS offering was two to three times more. For approximately $25,000, a StoneFly IP SAN solution, including a Storage Concentrator i1500, Nexsan ATAboy2 Storage Array, and Intel PRO/1000 T IP Storage Adapters, provided up to two terabytes of capacity—the equivalent of a $100,000 NAS solution.

Plug and Play with StoneFly

The StoneFly Storage Concentrator and the other components were installed in the first quarter 2003. Data migration also went much faster than the team predicted. It took less than an hour to move 37 gigabytes of data to the StoneFly system. The team consolidated storage for three primary servers over a three-week period. The first server contained all LAN connectivity, security and operating system data along with end-user applications such as Microsoft

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With the StoneFly Storage Concentrator in place, we can turn on a dime knowing we now have the capability to meet whatever our business demands."

Jim Rogers, assistant vice president of technical infrastructure for LifeCare Assurance.

"System installation was plug and play—with the StoneFly Storage Concentrator we had our IP SAN up and running in less than 15 minutes. The browser was so intuitive there was no learning curve whatsoever."

Mike Wolf, manager of technical services for LifeCare Assurance.

Word and Excel. The second server contained mission-critical data and recorded messages from the VoIP system. The third server contained documents and data from an automated forms management and workflow system.

While the data migration and consolidation was completely transparent to end users, subsequent performance improvements for file downloads and uploads were definitely noticed. "I used to get two to three calls each day from people complaining about problems accessing files," said Wolf. "Now, I don't get any calls relating to network performance." In fact, LifeCare Assurance has rated the performance of the system at least 30 percent faster than initially anticipated. "The system is as fast as or even faster than copying files to a local drive," added Wolf.

In addition to performance benefits, the IT team has found that centralized storage management offers another substantial improvement. "I never really knew the status of my storage before implementing the Storage Concentrator," explained Wolf. "It was extremely time consuming to track down event-log issues and monitor individual drives on a regular basis." With the StoneFly system in place, however, the team has anytime, anywhere access via GUI interface to access and administer changes. As a result, it now takes about 15 minutes to review event logs and perform routine maintenance. Previously, at least four hours were needed to do the same thing—a reduction in overall management of more than 90 percent.

Business Continuity

LifeCare Assurance's two-terabyte IP SAN can easily scale in the future to meet expanding storage requirements and business continuity protection Toward that end, the team has selected a highly secure data facility to house a second StoneFly Storage Concentrator and associated 2 TB disk arrays that will be connected to the primary site StoneFly IP SAN via a wide-area network (WAN). "The StoneFly IP SAN makes it easy to replicate data through my servers over a WAN and offers built-in redundancy, which is a big plus," Rogers said.

"With the StoneFly Storage Concentrator in place, we can turn on a dime knowing we now have the capability to meet whatever our business demands," summarized Rogers. "We've realized substantial return on investment—taking into consideration the low cost of the system, significant time savings in storage administration and impressive gains in overall productivity."

System Configuration:

Clients/Servers: 250 Microsoft Windows® 2000 Clients; a total of 36 Windows 2000 Servers
Network Set-up: StoneFly Networks™ Storage Concentrator™ i1500, 2.0 Terabyte Nexsan ATAboy2 Storage Array, 3Com Gigabit Ethernet 12-port SuperStack, Intel PRO/1000 T IP Storage Adapters