

Global PR Agency Adds Disaster Recovery and Replaces Tape with FlashNAS

Real-Time Computer Services Partners with Winchester Systems to Bring Affordable Data Protection Solutions to Mid-Sized Businesses



Gibbs & Soell, Inc. is a global consumer marketing and b2b public

relations firm headquartered in New York City with domestic offices in Chicago, San Francisco, and Raleigh. Its European operations, Gibbs & Soell, LLC, are headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland. The agency has more than 100 employees worldwide and has partners in Latin America and the Pacific Rim. Gibbs & Soell found itself in a situation that has become all too common for growing mid-sized businesses: Its data was expanding at a rate that was outstripping the capability of its standard disk-to-tape backup and disaster recovery systems to back up during the overnight window. Gibbs & Soell initially addressed this problem by acquiring additional servers to gain disk capacity and distribute the backup load. Although adding disks was relatively inexpensive, the company soon realized that adding tape capacity was an expensive proposition. Seth Niessen, the agency's controller, explains: "We were looking for a cost-effective approach in managing our network that would enhance performance, storage capacity, and provide for data disaster recovery."

Gibbs & Soell engaged Real-Time Computer Services, Inc., a New York

City computer consulting company, to suggest a different approach: Real-Time has been the agency's IT provider for the past 10 years. David Rosenbaum, owner, founder, and CEO of Real-Time, recognized that two major changes had occurred over the last three years that made the firm's architecture obsolete: (1) Gibbs & Soell's storage needs had grown considerably; (2) the cost of disk-to-disk storage had fallen significantly.

Rosenbaum viewed this situation as an opportunity to completely overhaul the company's network and create a new system of network attached storage (NAS) that would use Gibbs & Soell's four different domestic office locations to mirror and replicate data within their own sites rather than storing the data in a third-party warehouse. Although this is a configuration that Fortune 500 companies have been using for years, this is an entirely new solution in the small to mid-sized market.

FlashNAS Offers Fast, Affordable Network Attached Storage

The architecture considered by RCS required a fast, affordable, easy-to-deploy NAS-based, scalable technology. Rosenbaum chose Winchester Systems based on market

research and the personal experience of one of the Gibbs & Soell's local consultants who had worked with Winchester Systems in the past. Rosenbaum briefly looked at a Dell NAS solution that would have allowed Gibbs & Soell to maintain its relationship with a single vendor, but Winchester Systems won the account because it offered the most cost-effective NAS solution on the market.

According to Rosenbaum, "While Dell offers a NAS solution, Winchester Systems was the only company we seriously considered because we like that the company's core products are data storage solutions. In other words, data storage is not a sideline business. We also like their approach, which focuses on reliability, scalability, testing, and state-of-the-art technology. The critical factor that clinched the deal was Winchester Systems' attitude of 'we'll do what it takes to do the job right: we'll go the whole nine yards.'" So Rosenbaum forged a partnership with Winchester Systems, which brought together Real-Time's understanding of Gibbs & Soell's business needs and network design considerations and Winchester Systems' data storage expertise.



FlashNAS Provides Continuous Data Protection

The new system uses Winchester Systems' FlashNAS at all of the agency's four domestic locations. Each office does local disk-to-disk backups from one FlashNAS shelf to another, as well as off-site real-time replications. With this configuration, the New York and Raleigh offices back up each other, as do the Chicago and San Francisco offices. The multi-generations of local backup and disaster recovery offsite backup are controlled by XOssoft replication software to eliminate any downtime and any tape backup. There are 2.4 terabytes of storage in New York – 400 gigabytes of primary storage and 2 terabytes of backup, both local and remote. The other three offices each have 1.2 terabytes of storage – 200 gigabytes of primary storage and 1 terabyte of backup.

The transition to the new system was accomplished one office at a time, taking six months for the entire system to be switched and up and running. "We are very pleased with the design and implementation of the new system, and we're confident in its ability to meet our growing data needs," says Niessen.

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Dave Rosenbaum,
Founder, Real-Time Computer
Services

FlashAlert Couples with Real-Time for Proactive Failure Alert

In addition, a proactive alerting system was installed through Winchester Systems' FlashAlert and Real-Time Computer Services' own system. In the event of a hardware failure, replication failure, or a communication failure, the network notifies both Winchester Systems and Real-Time Computer Services of any components that are reporting technical issues. Rosenbaum explains, "While there have been only a few glitches, the redundancy has proven its worth. There was an Internet circuit failure and the email routing kicked in and flowed traffic around it. A drive failed on one of the Winchester Systems devices, at which point its spare kicked in and we hot-swapped out the failed

component without downing the network. We had routine maintenance, which tested the environment's ability to spool changes: It was all done very successfully."

The Winchester Systems Experience

"Working with Winchester Systems has been an absolute pleasure," says Rosenbaum. "The company was not only receptive to hearing about the needs of this mid-sized market, but they were instrumental in validating Real-Time Computer Services' network design. Since small businesses tend not to budget as formally as big businesses, Winchester Systems worked with us to modify the configuration to be within our client's price point. The company delivered exactly when it said it would and kept us posted as the process went along from manufacturing to implementation. Winchester Systems also agreed to provide training before the installation, assistance during the installation, and support after the installations, which is a real bonus. Based on this experience we look forward to forging new partnerships with Winchester Systems in this market size".