

Key Highlights

Business Profile

Automotive member services organization offering roadside, travel, and insurance services

Industry

Automotive, travel, insurance, and related services

Challenges

- > Slow, unreliable, and complex tape backup processes
- > Difficulty meeting backup windows
- > Short retention periods
- > Time-consuming restores

Solution

- > Two DD560 systems, one DD410 system and one DD580 system
- > Data Domain Replicator Software

Backup Software

- > HP Data Protector

Benefits

- > Longer retention periods
- > Increased customer satisfaction
- > Greater productivity
- > Cost savings

Streamlined Backups and Longer Retention Periods

Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) is a federation of nine automotive clubs serving over 5 million members through more than 140 offices across Canada, offering a variety of automotive, travel, insurance, and related services. From its headquarters in Thornhill, Ontario, CAA South Central Ontario (CAA SCO) employs over 1,200 people and operates over 40 branch offices as well as a central call center.



By adopting the Data Domain platform, CAA SCO has been able to streamline their backup process, increasing their onsite data retention period from just seven days to a full month. In turn, this has enabled very rapid response times to restore requests – often in just minutes rather than days as data tapes is less likely to be accessed for restores. As a result, the IT team spends far less time managing backups and restores, and can focus on other responsibilities and activities that can benefit the organization. Implementing the Data Domain solution also enabled the CAA SCO IT team to avoid the significant cost of upgrading their existing tape library system.

Customer Challenges

As a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week service organization, CAA must not only ensure that information systems are constantly available, but also preserve and protect member data including insurance information. “Our planned downtime windows have to be extremely small to accommodate the constant demand for services and data availability,” explains Prem Ratnam Manager, Systems & Security Administration with CAA SCO. “We had an existing StorageTek library system and four LTO2 tape drives that couldn’t finish our backups within the designated window of 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.”

In addition to the backup window challenge, the limitations of the tape system affected their data retention policy. “Because we only had an 80-slot library, we couldn’t retain more than seven days worth of data on site,” Ratnam recalls. “Most of our restore requests were for data that was outside the seven-day period, which meant we had to restore from tape that was stored off site. When a restore request came in, it would normally take at least a day for the tapes to be delivered and five to ten hours to restore data from them. If one of the tapes was missing or corrupt, we couldn’t do the restore.”

For the IT team this process was frustrating and time-consuming. “We were spending practically all our time servicing these restore requests, which was supposed to be only a small part of our job,” said Ratnam. “We needed a longer retention period, and the

options available were either to buy a bigger library, faster tape drives, or go to a disk-based solution.”

Data Domain Solution

Ratnam and his team wanted to find a different approach. “We had been researching virtual tape libraries because that seemed to be the next best thing that was available. But then we attended a seminar where Data Domain was presenting and we really liked the solution: we had never considered deduplicating before. The idea of writing to disk and treating it as a disk instead of as a virtual tape made better sense.”

Ratnam contacted Data Domain to arrange for a demo and soon they had a Data Domain DD560 system up and running. “The team from Data Domain was very professional, very thorough. We tried out the system as a pilot and liked it,” he says. “In addition to Data Domain we evaluated another disk-based backup product. We compared them side by side for about three months and liked the Data Domain system much better.”

The DD560 system has enabled CAA to increase their data retention period from seven days to a full month. They retain about 100 TB of backup data and each night they backup about 3 TB of data. The IT team also added a DD580 and a DD410 system in their primary data center to handle special backups. “We do mainly full backups, and some incrementals,” notes Ratnam. “We do still make use of the tape systems. Once

"It was very easy to integrate the Data Domain appliance into our environment. We use HP Data Protector software for our backups; the DD560 just became another disk-based target for Data Protector. We had it up and running within a few hours."

Prem Ratnam
Manager, Systems & Security Administration
Canadian Automobile Association

a month we write from the Data Domain system to tape and send those off site."

CAA has expanded their Data Domain solution to include a disaster recovery site that cross replicates with the primary data center. Ratnam explains, "We have a branch about 150 kilometers away that has a small data center and we use that as a DR site. We're using a DD560 system with an add on expansion shelf at that site and replicating all our data from headquarters overnight to it. Likewise, they are replicating their data back to headquarters at the same time."

Business Benefits

The CAA SCO IT team has seen a broad range of benefits ranging from cost savings to increased customer satisfaction and greater productivity. According to Ratnam, "It was very easy to integrate the Data Domain appliance into our environment. We use HP Data Protector software for our backups; the DD560 just became another disk-based target for Data Protector. We had it up and running within a few hours."

The simplicity of the Data Domain system became even more obvious in comparison to the other system they were evaluating. Ratnam recalls, "In contrast, the other product was very complex to set up. It was more of a software-based solution so it needed a lot of hardware behind it, but the vendor didn't want to spend time with us setting up the required hardware because that 'wasn't their job.' We also found out that we'd have to replace our entire backup infrastructure to accommodate their solution and the learning curve would have been huge. That wasn't the case at all with Data Domain – we were able to integrate it easily with our existing backup software with no problems. This was one of the major factors in deciding to go with Data Domain."

Regarding the compression rates he and his team are achieving with the Data Domain system, Ratnam explains, "We back up three kinds of systems: HP UNIX, Windows, and a Novell NetWare environment. We're getting very good compression with UNIX and Windows data – in the neighborhood of 30x to 35x compression and it keeps getting better. On the Novell side, the data is already pre-compressed, but even there we're seeing up to 10x further compression; for this we're working out a way to turn off the automatic compression with NetWare to get even better compression."

By extending their data retention period from seven days to one month, the CAA SCO IT team has streamlined the process for restoring files and avoided the significant cost of expanding their tape library system. Ratnam notes, "We analyzed our restore requests over the last 2 to 3 years and found that the majority of requests were for data that was between one week and one month old. The new one-month retention policy that we have achieved with Data Domain is optimal for our operations. Now when we need to restore a file we just point and click and the file is back."

Aside from providing better service to their client organizations and saving money, the IT team is enjoying much greater productivity. "The Data Domain system has helped us a great deal," says Ratnam "and the time required for restores has really shrunk. Not long after we started using Data Domain, we had a restore request from our HR department having to do with employee bonuses. While we had them on the phone we restored the data in less than a minute and the bonus amounts were corrected immediately. It was a small amount of data but highly critical. In the past that process might have taken days to complete."

Data Domain

2421 Mission College Blvd.
Santa Clara, CA 95054
866-WE-DDUPE; 408-980-4800
24 international offices
www.datadomain.com

Copyright © 2008 Data Domain, Inc. All rights reserved. Specifications subject to change without notice. Data Domain, the Data Domain logo and Global Compression are trademarks or registered trademarks of Data Domain, Inc. All other trademarks used or mentioned herein belong to their respective owners. CS-CAA-0608