NetApp®

Success Story

The Cordant Group turns to NetApp's Cloud ONTAP® operating system to address storage issues

Cordant Group

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Success Story

The Cordant Group chose the NetApp® Cloud ONTAP® operating system to address storage issues following a wider move of its IT infrastructure to a virtual private cloud on Amazon Web Services (AWS). As a result, the company, which has used NetApp technologies for 10 years, essentially replicated its physical storage environment in the cloud with the added advantage of considerable cost savings.

Customer Profile

The Cordant Group family business was founded in 1957, specialising in security services and, a short time later, integrated cleaning solutions. These businesses generated a lot of success, enabling the company to buy a number of businesses over a 50-year period to become one of the leading security and facilities management businesses in the UK.

In 2005, the Cordant Group moved into recruitment following the acquisition of Pro Vista Recruitment. It then embarked on a 10-year journey of strategic acquisitions to become one of the major recruitment organisations in the UK.

The Cordant Group has 192 locations and 5,200 clients across the UK. It specialises in 36 industry sectors. In its latest financial year, the company registered a £609 million turnover. Its ambition is to continue growing and to transform the way both facilities management, incorporating security services, and recruitment are delivered to ensure that customers benefit from outstanding and innovative services.

The Challenge

Because of the scale of its operations, Cordant Group has an extensive IT infrastructure serving the business. The range of services includes websites for the various different operations, a Citrix thin-client model delivering desktop services, and SQL databases that hold data essential to the successful running of daily operations as well as other services.

Relatively recently the company made the decision to move from a capex model to an opex model. The decision was straightforward, explains Paul Brown, IT director for Infrastructure and Support: "It's about costs and flexibility and the ability to scale up and down. Our physical equipment is essentially in use 9 to 5 from Monday to Friday. So our equipment is pretty much doing nothing for a substantial amount of time. By moving to the cloud we're looking at cost savings in the region of 40 to 50%. It's a simple equation."

> "Cloud ONTAP basically replicates the physical environment, so we're using the same features and getting the same benefits for the business except overall the cloud opex model is enabling significant cost savings."

Paul Brown
IT Director for Infrastructure and Support, Cordant Group

The company moved the majority of its services to a virtual private cloud hosted on Amazon Web Services, which lets Cordant provision a private, isolated section of the public AWS cloud so that it can launch customised resources as required.

AWS also provides storage available on tap through a web services interface to store and retrieve data from anywhere on the web. It was a compelling offer given that Cordant would pay only for the storage it used. However, regarding file server resource management, the company was restricted to Windows DFS. Brown says, "Our users are in geographically distributed sites and clearly it's important to keep users connected to the files they need. But with Windows DFS there were limitations, so we wanted to find an alternative cloud storage option."

The Solution
For the previous 10 years Cordant had used NetApp technologies to provide it with flexible, robust, and high-performing storage. For instance, it had used NetApp FAS8020 clusters for its production and disaster recovery sites.

Last year NetApp launched NetApp Cloud ONTAP® for AWS. Built on NetApp clustered Data ONTAP, Cloud ONTAP is a software storage appliance that runs on AWS server and storage resources which also provides a number of performance and capacity options. These range from small-capacity, low-performance applications to medium-scale workloads with higher-performance demands. A complete virtual environment with clustered Data ONTAP can be up and running in minutes, including servers, storage, and networking.

The solution includes a raft of features typically associated with NetApp storage, such as NetApp SnapManager® for SQL, to enable quick backups and robust disaster recovery. Brown explains, "While our initial issue was about file management, we decided to move to Cloud ONTAP because it also offered more than file management. It's a complete data management platform and includes OnCommand Cloud Manager, which in simple terms makes it really easy to manage storage in the cloud."

Business Benefits
Easy to use
NetApp Cloud ONTAP is extremely easy to use. A simple web-based interface allows straightforward storage management. Cloud Manager provides installation, resource assignment, and provisioning of data with the same interfaces and tools used for traditional NetApp storage.

Brown says, "It's in the cloud but it's still NetApp. We've used NetApp for 10 years and never had a problem with it. We have a simple drag-and-drop screen and can manage storage requirements and file management so much more easily."

Provides robust backups
Clearly backup is extremely important to Cordant Group. Its SQL data is the lifeblood of the company and includes financial information to ERP data and a lot more. NetApp Cloud ONTAP provides NetApp Snapshot® Manager for SQL, which makes it extremely easy to replicate data. "We can do important data restores in less than an hour, so the business is always running along healthily whatever problems we might encounter. This is one of the cornerstones of Cloud ONTAP," adds Brown.

Drives cost savings
Cloud Manager monitors and provides feedback on the cost of resources over time. This informs accurate decision-making when moving workloads according to cost efficiency. In short, it's easy to see the storage resources that are required and the instances of storage resources consumed. Such information enables accurate planning. Brown adds, "With a capex model it was a question of putting your finger in the air to anticipate shifting storage requirements. Now we can see what we need immediately and accommodate changes very easily in the most cost-effective manner."

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Offers enterprise features

NetApp Cloud ONTAP provides Cordant Group with enterprise features that allow the company to replicate its on-premises environment. Both NAS and SAN storage can be provisioned alongside CIFS, NFS, and iSCSI support. Snapshot copies also provide near-instantaneous backups without requiring additional storage resources or affecting application performance.

Brown says, "Cloud ONTAP basically replicates the physical environment, so we're using the same features and getting the same benefits for the business except overall the cloud opex model is enabling significant cost savings."

Provides responsive and detailed support

Support for NetApp Cloud ONTAP is quick and detailed. A number of self-support options are available, such as a knowledge base, documentation, videos, and community forums. Online support is also responsive and detailed. "Our support requirements have been quite limited, but when we do need support we simply log a call and the response is very quick. It's reassuring," says Brown.

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