The Master Group adapts to new business needs with M365 backup as a service and FortKnox on AWS

Master

INDUSTRY
HVAC/R Distributor

USE CASE
Backup and Recovery, Disaster Recovery, Long-term Retention and Archival, Ransomware Protection, Data Isolation and Recovery as a Service

COHESITY SOLUTIONS
Backup as a Service (BaaS) for Microsoft 365, CloudArchive, DataProtect, FortKnox

DATA SOURCES
Microsoft 365, Microsoft SQL Server, VMware vSphere

SOLUTION PARTNERS
Cisco

AWS CHANNEL PARTNER
Insight Canada

Key Benefits

- Stronger business resilience with virtual air-gapped backup
- 10 times faster backups
- 75% faster full backup of mailboxes
- 78% faster incremental backup of mailboxes
- Six rack units reclaimed

To keep its HVAC business humming, The Master Group needed more reliable backups, faster restores, and stronger security. The answer: Cohesity DataProtect on Cisco Hyperflex infrastructure. After later adopting Microsoft 365, the company avoided the cost of more on-prem infrastructure by using Cohesity backup as a service on AWS. And for even stronger security, The Master Group now stores another backup copy completely off its network, using Cohesity FortKnox on AWS.

Challenges

To keep customers happy and operations running smoothly, The Master Group counts on ready access to virtual machines, databases, and Microsoft 365 files. "Lost files, server failures, and cyberattacks can interfere with customer service," says François Lepage, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Manager. "To be resilient, we need fast backups, fast restores, and protection against ransomware and other attacks."

Until 2019, The Master Group backed up with Quest Rapid Recovery (previously AppAssure). But the old solution crumpled under growing data volume—75 TB as of 2023. "Daily backups didn't work reliably, backups and restores took too long, and we didn't have ransomware protection," Lepage says. Restoring VMs was especially time-consuming because Rapid Recovery doesn't integrate with VMware, so Lepage's team had to spend days rebuilding VMs from scratch.

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> **François LePage**, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Manager

An opportunity to modernize data protection arrived in 2019, when The Master Group added a disaster recovery data center and moved to Cisco Hyperflex infrastructure, which combines compute, storage, and networking in one device. "Now we had the infrastructure to improve our recovery time and recovery point objectives—we just needed the right software," Lepage says.

Solution

After evaluating 12 backup solutions, Lepage narrowed the list to Cohesity, Commvault, and Rubrik. "In a one-month proof of value, we saw that Cohesity is the easiest to deploy, backs up twice as fast, restores fastest, and gives us better cybersecurity protections," Lepage says. In the proof of value, Cohesity backed up more than 1 TB in one hour, compared to 700 MB for Rubrik and 600 MB for Commvault. VM restores were also faster, partly because Cohesity integrates with Cisco HyperFlex right out of the box. The solution was up and running in less than four hours.

Initially, LePage created two sets of Cohesity backups, one on HyperFlex in the main data center and another in the disaster recovery data center. He used Cohesity CloudArchive to push data to AWS S3 Glacier for long-term archiving. Ransomware attackers can't encrypt or delete Cohesity backups, and for extra protection Lepage selected the option to require two people to authorize any changes to backups.

In 2022, Lepage adopted two more Cohesity cloud solutions to address new business needs. One need: cost-effective backups of the company's new Microsoft 365 apps, including 1200 mailboxes. "Cohesity backup as a service for M365 on AWS saves us the costs of buying and managing on-prem infrastructure, and doesn't clog our network bandwidth," Lepage says. "Restores are at least as fast as they are from on-prem backups."

At the same time, wary of the rising ransomware threat, The Master Group wanted an additional air-gapped backup completely disconnected from its own network. "The best way to be sure attackers won't get access to your data is to isolate a copy off-prem in a cloud storage bucket," Lepage says. "AWS Glacier is built for long-term archiving, and restores take too long. Cohesity FortKnox on AWS is the way to go."

Adding Cohesity BaaS for M365 and Cohesity FortKnox as backup targets took just three minutes. "I just logged into the Cohesity console, set up role-based access, selected the assets to protect, and set the schedule," Lepage says. "That's it."

Results

The air-gapped backup copy, stored securely in a FortKnox vault on AWS, brings peace of mind to Lepage and company leadership. "If you have my job," Lepage says, "the only way to sleep well is to store a copy of your data off your network and inaccessible to bad actors both external and internal to the company. We already had good protection from Cohesity on-prem backups. FortKnox adds another safeguard in the unlikely event both of our other copies are breached. It's fast: we restored a 20 GB VM in just two minutes."

In general, backups are 10 times as fast with Cohesity compared to the old solution—1024 GB per hour compared to 100 GB per hour. Backing up 14 TB of Exchange data on-prem took 48 hours with the old solution compared to just 12 hours with Cohesity BaaS for M365. Incremental backups that previously took 90 minutes now complete in just 20 minutes. With shorter backups, Master Group can back up more frequently, so restored VMs and files are more current. "The biggest benefits of Cohesity for our company are mass restores of virtual machines in just a few minutes, and Google-like search to find files to recover, including individual emails," Lepage says. "If someone asks us to restore an email, we can generally do it in less than two minutes. With our old solution, just finding the file took about an hour."

Management also saves precious hours. "With our old solution I spent about an hour a day, five hours a week, checking the console to make sure we had enough capacity for backups," Lepage says. "With Cohesity I only spend about 15 minutes a week on management."

Data center costs dropped because Cohesity backups take up less space. The Master Group is seeing 3:1 data reduction from deduplication and compression, which freed up six rack units.

What's next? The Master Group uses several Cisco Security products, and Lepage is planning to connect the dots with Cisco SecureX. One input will be backup size, reported by Cohesity DataProtect. "From SecureX we'll be able to correlate a change in backup size with other information to detect potential malicious activity—and respond quickly," LePage says. He's also eyeing Cohesity SiteContinuity for Disaster Recovery as a Service and Cohesity DataHawk, which integrates with scanning solutions to help detect threats early and classify sensitive data. Lepage gives credit to the company's forward-thinking leaders, saying, "Our board of directors is willing to invest in Cohesity data protection because they understand that we could be hit by a cyberattack at any time."

COHESITY

Main benefits for The Master Group include:

- Stronger business resilience with virtual air-gapped backup

- Infrastructure and bandwidth cost savings with cloud backups for M365

- 10 times faster backups

- 75% faster full backup of mailboxes—12 hours, down from 48

- 78% faster incremental backup of mailboxes—20 minutes, down from 90

- Six rack units reclaimed

- 15 minutes weekly management time, down from 5 hours

About The Master Group

A leader in the heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration sector, and celebrating 70 years in business in March 2022, The Master Group has been named one of Canada's Best Managed Companies since 2010 and is the largest private HVAC/R distributor in Canada. The company employs 1,100 dynamic and devoted individuals who serve the industry at more than 49 branches and 4 distribution centers throughout the country.

Learn more at Cohesity.com

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