VITAS Healthcare Reduces Time Spent on Onsite and Cloud Backup by 90%

VITAS® Healthcare

INDUSTRY
Healthcare

USE CASE
Backup and Recovery,
Disaster Recovery

DATA SOURCES
VMware
Microsoft SQL

PARTNER
Pivot

Key Benefits

- 90% reduction in weekly staff time spent managing backups
- Ability to create and publish file shares for access through SMB and the use of S3 containers with Cohesity SmartFiles
- 80% reduction in backup policies—from about 60 to 10
- Reduced database backups from 4 TB to less than 1 TB with S3 component

Healthcare organizations are required to retain patient data for specific periods of time. At VITAS Healthcare, that means not only protecting patient charts for seven years but being able to quickly access and retrieve them for audit and business purposes. Challenged by legacy products to back up data, VITAS chose Cohesity's next-gen data management capabilities to simplify data management onsite and in the cloud so the company could easily migrate data across systems and use it to support quality assurance and testing. With Cohesity DataProtect, VITAS radically reduced time spent on backups by 90% while having greater assurance its data is both secure and available when needed. Cohesity SmartFiles, a secure file and object solution for modernizing data and application management, provided cost and performance benefits with respect to patient documents and images access.

Challenges

VITAS experienced time and resource constraints with its legacy backup products, Commvault and Veeam with ExaGrid. The company's in-house electronic medical record (EMR) application, for example, took about two days to back up, and each time, there were issues to babysit. Incremental backups were also problematic, particularly with structured data sources on physical systems. Steep product learning curves required VITAS to employ a dedicated resource for backups. Furthermore, complex licensing penalized data growth, and upgrades required dedicated, difficult-to-manage media servers.

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> "Cohesity protects our data and makes it easily accessible in a secure way while ensuring we're prepared for whatever comes next—from audit restores to ransomware recovery. The platform also significantly reduces our cycle time."
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> – Ainsworth Palmer, AVP IT Infrastructure, VITAS Healthcare

VITAS engaged with Cohesity in 2017. "We were modernizing to a software-defined data center (SDDC) and looking for capabilities outside of the traditional SAN storage platform," remembers Adam Alicea, Director of Enterprise Engineering at VITAS Healthcare. "We had challenges with other products and liked Cohesity because it could back up our VMware virtual machine (VM) environment and migrate data to the cloud. As we were maturing our infrastructure, Cohesity was broadening its solution so we made a conscious effort to fully embrace the Cohesity platform."

Solution

Today, Cohesity is one of the standards of the VITAS hybrid cloud infrastructure. VITAS powers two data centers with VMware SDDC technologies—VMware vSphere, VMware vCenter, VMware vSAN, and VMware NSX—and Cohesity clusters replicate backup data between them. VITAS also has an egress from the secondary site to the cloud using Azure blobs for long-term retention. "Cohesity works very nicely with all of our technologies and cloud backup was actually our company's first cloud presence," says Alicea.

Today, VITAS backs up about two petabytes of structured and unstructured data from Microsoft SQL and VMware VMs. It also protects images—stored as objects—in its in-house EMR for compliance. From a recovery standpoint, VITAS can restore VMs and images with Cohesity in either data center as well as monitor the complete environment through Cohesity Helios.

"With the Cohesity platform, we have confidence in our backups completing daily as well as assurance that we have a full view," explains Ainsworth Palmer, AVP IT Infrastructure at VITAS Healthcare.

With Cohesity DataProtect, VITAS IT now gives its remote network system engineers self-service access to perform their own restores in the field—for single files or entire VMs—saving everyone time. Cohesity also allows VITAS staff to quickly spin up a VM for running software in test environments leveraging VMware compute and Cohesity capacity. "Once it's live and teams get what they need, they can let it go," says Alicea.

VITAS achieves other advantages from Cohesity SmartFiles, including the ability to create and publish file shares for access through SMB and the use of S3 containers. According to Alicea, Cohesity has been transformational in terms of database performance for the protection of patient-related documents and images because those images were previously stored inside the database. "Now they're simply a reference to Cohesity capacity," says Alicea. "And with Cohesity, we avoid the need to procure that very fast, high-end, all-flash storage."

In the evolving security landscape—with increasing ransomware attacks—VITAS is confident in Cohesity's cybersecurity approach. In addition to secure data isolation, VITAS values other Cohesity safeguards such as only allowing a select group of people to access data and proactive notifications of abnormal entropy in backups, signaling that a lot of data has changed and there could be an important issue to quickly probe further.

"A big fear of ransomware with healthcare organizations is finding out about an intrusion 45-days later that exceeds retention policy requirements," explains Alicea. "For us to get an alert from Cohesity Helios with information that our backup data significantly changed, for example by 70% indiciating encryption, ensures us that we don't find out too late. That type of AI from Cohesity is of really high value."

Results

From a business perspective, Cohesity is significantly easier for the VITAS team to administer. IT has consolidated data center and remote location servers to improve data protection and speed recoveries. In contrast to backups running long—often entire weekends—and always having operational problems, Cohesity reduces cycle time.

"When our dedicated backup person retired, reduced cycle time from Cohesity allowed us to staff at a higher level which improved our capabilities," says Palmer. "A big benefit of the Cohesity platform is that it frees employees up to do more mission-critical work than babysitting backups."

From a technical perspective, Cohesity is simplicity. The team now spends fewer than two hours a week dealing with regular backups. Creating backup jobs and policies is also easier. "We all go to one management console. No one needs the equivalent of a bachelor's degree to work it. It talks to our vSphere. We can do free text searches—pull up things very quickly. Every store doesn't need much more than a pre-configured spot in VMware and to spin up the VM. It can't get any easier in my opinion," says Alicea. Cohesity automatically runs installs and upgrades, while the support team stands at the ready to engage, as needed.

Operationally, anyone on the team can simply log into a web portal and train a new resource in about 15 minutes, according to Alicea. "That's the ease of Cohesity recovery."

COHESITY

With Cohesity, VITAS has achieved the following benefits:

- 90% reduction in weekly staff time spent managing backups

- Staff reallocation from "babysitting" backups to more important work

- Ability to create and publish file shares for access through SMB and the use of S3 containers with Cohesity SmartFiles

- 80% reduction in backup policies—from about 60 to 10

- Reduced database backups from 4 TB to less than 1 TB with S3 component

- Fast self-service restores from remote locations with only 15 minutes of training

- Ransomware protection

About VITAS Healthcare

VITAS Healthcare, a pioneer in the hospice movement since 1978, is the nation's leading provider of end-of-life care. Its name, derived from the Latin word for "lives," symbolizes the VITAS mission: to preserve the quality of life for those who have a limited time to live. VITAS Healthcare provided $13 million in genuine charity care to hospice patients nationwide in 2019.

Learn more at Cohesity.com

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