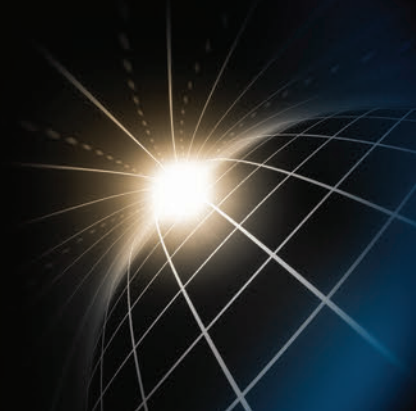


Easter Seals Wisconsin



The business of caring requires resilient IT and uptime assurance

Business situation

Easter Seals Southeast Wisconsin has been creating life-changing solutions for people with disabilities and their families for nearly 77 years. The agency offers over 15 programs and services that help individuals with disabilities achieve independence and choice with equal opportunities to live, work and play in their communities. Programs range from early intervention Birth to Three and autism services to recreational and respite opportunities for children and their families. Additional programs also include adult day programs, training and employment, advocacy and guardianship.

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Joe Ulm
President, Information Technology Professionals

QUICK FACTS

SOLUTION PROFILE

- Revamp infrastructure to accommodate business growth and program support
- High availability architecture delivering uptime assurance for mission-critical applications
- Proactive system availability monitoring and management from a remote site
- Disaster recovery capabilities

PRODUCTS

- Stratus Avance® high availability software
- Dell® T710 servers
- Microsoft® SQL Server® 2008, Exchange 2010, and SharePoint® software

Uptime. **All the time.**



Like all charities, Easter Seals was challenged by the economic turmoil gripping the nation at the end of the last decade. But, unlike many others, it merged with a partner agency, doubled in size, and increased services. It has seven buildings spread over 30 miles. Two hundred employee run its programs, increasing to 260 in summer to staff summer respite camps. Working almost entirely out in the community serving its constituents, Easter Seals serves over 2,500 individuals each month.

The organization was quickly outgrowing the capabilities of its computer systems. “Easter Seals’ technology was dated and unable to keep up with increasing demands placed upon it,” said Joe Ulm, president of Information Technology Professionals (ITP), who provisions, manages and maintains the IT infrastructure at the charity’s multiple offices. “These demands included uptime assurance for their applications, not only for business operations but to track and file medical and insurance information about clients participating in some of its programs.”

Easter Seals is a non-profit organization, but still very much a business with accounting, program and campaign management, online collaboration, and office operations that are

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all computer-based. They needed new applications to support operations, communicate effectively and reliably with more people, and handle greater file sizes and data volumes. The more efficiently it runs its business and measures its effectiveness, the more people will benefit from its programs. “Together, we took a hard look at their business strategy and proposed technology updates and additions to support that strategy in a way that would provide value for years to come.”

Business strategy

With growth comes increased in complexity in all facets of day-to-day operations. Fundraising is a major source of income, representing 26 percent of revenue in 2010. Services revenue — that is, fees others pay to Easter Seals — accounted for another 45 percent. To help drive more programs, the agency prepares and submits as many grant applications as it can for new funding ... 13 percent of its 2010 revenue stream. Beyond the accounting and fund raising that maintain community services, Easter Seals runs programs that come with critical demands for timely reporting.

“Services for children with autism were wanting in our coverage area, so 15 months ago we began a program to address this underserved community,” said David Roach, vice president of finance for Easter Seals Wisconsin. “This program and others like it have reporting requirements much like hospitals and clinics do. Our counselors have to be able to report 24/7 on participants’ care plans, medical requirements, and treatment outcomes. Data are input through our system directly to insurance companies for billing and reimbursement purposes. Most of this is done remotely, any time night or day, so systems have to be available continuously.”



Ever cognizant of the non-profit's budget limitations, ITP developed a proposal that would enable Easter Seals to benefit from current technologies, accommodate growth, provide a high degree of uptime assurance, and move forward with a disaster recovery plan. Further, ITP estimated that the new products it had specified would save Easter Seals tens of thousands of dollars compared to more commonly applied approaches to achieve similar, but not necessarily better results.

The managed services provider had recently signed on with Stratus Technologies as a product and services reseller. ITP recommended that Stratus Avance software be a key component in Easter Seals' upgraded IT infrastructure.

"Avance software was the solution enabler," said Ulm. "It gave us a high-availability computing platform, virtualization, intuitive Web-based system management tools, and proactive alerting to help us head off problems

"We can't afford the luxury of downtime. Even planned downtime is scheduled three weeks in advance so that employees in the office and working remotely are not caught by surprise."

David Roach
Vice President of Finance
Easter Seals Wisconsin

before they arose. It is also very simple to install, use and manage. That's important to us as the party responsible for protecting Easter Seals' interests with regards to the organization's technology. Avance provided clear and critical advantages over cluster solutions."

Avance software automatically sets up and manages itself, greatly reducing the opportunity for human error and thereby improving the uptime and reliability of the infrastructure. The software works to detect and prevent outages preemptively. Even when the hardware fails, the Avance real-time dual-server architecture ensures that applications operate uninterrupted, with no data loss.

Easter Seals had three x86 servers, each running one application. Avance let ITP replace the one server/one application model with a two-node Dell server platform supporting five virtual machines, adding two new applications to the three it already had. The Avance platform now supports Microsoft SQL Server 2008, Exchange 2010, and SharePoint, in addition to terminal server and print, file and domain server.

"We can't afford the luxury of downtime. Even planned downtime is scheduled three weeks in advance so that employees in the office and working remotely are not caught by surprise," said Roach. "It is very critical that all of our applications and remote access are up around the clock, 365 days a year."

Business Impact

Easter Seals can now accommodate the increasing demands placed upon its IT systems, as well as keep pace with future growth. It is looking to its new infrastructure to also help it prepare for the unpredictable through its disaster recovery capabilities.

“ There is really no reason for companies to live with downtime risk when products like Avance are easily within reach of most IT budgets today.”

Joe Ulm
President
Information Technology Professionals

Frequent incidents of severe weather, tornadoes and flooding have hit Wisconsin and many other states. Disaster recovery planning is increasingly a priority in IT infrastructure planning, as it is with ITP and Easter Seals. Wisconsin has a well-developed MPLS (Multiprotocol Label Switching) network. It is essentially a cloud network to which you can connect from any location covered by the service provider. Avance software has a ‘split site’ feature that allows the server nodes to be geographically separated. ITP is testing to determine if the prescribed distance of separation can be increased over MPLS.

“Our engineers are putting the software through its paces in order to get the maximum separation between the two nodes while still ensuring the highest quality transmission possible. This could be a big step forward for the software. We’ll know more soon.”

One thing Easter Seals and ITP know very well already is that the Stratus Avance software has performed as promised. They have had no instances of unplanned downtime. “There is really no reason for companies to live with downtime risk when products like Avance are easily within reach of most IT budgets today.”

About Stratus

Stratus delivers uptime assurance for the applications its customers depend on most for their success. With its resilient software and hardware, backed by proactive availability management services, Stratus® products help to save lives and to protect the business and reputations of companies, institutions, and governments the world over.

To learn more about worry-free computing, visit www.stratus.com.

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