



Advertising Standards Authority protects critical internal application with Claranet Disaster Recovery solution

Advertising Standards Authority

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) regulates advertising across all media in the UK, and has been working to keep advertisements legal, decent, honest and truthful for more than 50 years. A crucial part of the ASA's duties involves acting on complaints lodged by consumers and businesses about advertising content.

In recent years, the number of complaints registered by the ASA has risen steadily, driven in part by the exponential growth of online media. In 2012 alone, the organisation investigated more than 31,000 complaints about 18,990 ads.



The challenge

To ensure that all complaints are dealt with efficiently, the ASA maintains a vast complaints management database, which acts as an electronic record of all registered complaints and related correspondence. The complaints database runs in a virtualised VMware environment hosted by ASA's on-premises IT infrastructure, and needs to meet stringent availability criteria.

Giles King, Systems Manager at the Advertising Standards Authority, elaborated: "We have strict targets for investigating complaints and aim to turn around most cases within five to ten days. This makes it absolutely essential for us to ensure that the information in our database remains highly available at all times. Not only would downtime impact our ability to resolve existing complaints on time, it would also create a backlog of new complaints for us to deal with, causing further delays."

While the ASA performed regular backups of its systems, the organisation was not confident in its existing disaster recovery strategy. If physical systems at its main data centre failed, the ASA would have to contract an external provider to ship backup servers to its main site then manually restore systems from backups, which could take several days – a delay that the organisation could not afford.



Key services:

- Disaster Recovery Services
- Business and Enterprise Cloud Backup

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The solution

To ensure a swift return to business as usual, even after a major disruption, the ASA looked to upgrade to a failsafe business continuity and disaster recovery solution. After meeting with a number of providers, the organisation engaged IBM Business Partner and business continuity specialist Claranet to develop and host a state-of-the-art disaster recovery platform, fully interoperable with ASA's existing platform. Convinced by Claranet's credentials, the ASA moved ahead with a proof-of-concept phase, testing a disaster recovery as a service (DRaaS) solution that used VMware vCenter Site Recovery Manager (SRM) to automatically replicate virtualised applications to a secure cloud platform, fully managed by Claranet.

Claranet established a dedicated disaster recovery environment for the ASA's complaints management database on its DRaaS platform. The cloud recovery environment is hosted at Claranet's own UK-based data centre on IBM System x3550 M4 servers and shared storage based on IBM Storwize V7000. The System x servers are optimised for performance, featuring the latest Intel Xeon E5-2600 series processors, and deliver outstanding uptime, offering the ideal foundation for a cloud environment. Claranet has provisioned a number of virtual servers on the System x servers using VMware vSphere.

"Moving to a fully managed, hosted disaster recovery platform meant that we avoided the expense and effort of provisioning the environment ourselves, as well as the ongoing cost of staffing and general overhead," said King. "If there are any problems, Claranet will be there to see that they are resolved right away, which saves us a considerable amount of effort. With Claranet managing everything, we don't even have to think about it."

To provide failover capabilities between the main instance of the ASA's complaints management database and the disaster recovery platform, Claranet uses VMware vCenter Site Recovery Manager (SRM) on the DRaaS platform. The solution leverages VMware vSphere replication using SRM to deliver simple and powerful replication of applications, along with fully automated site recovery and migration.

The solution handles the switch-over to virtual servers in the recovery environment, as well as the switch-back to the original production servers once the disaster scenario is over. This means that when the ASA fails back over to the original hardware, the organisation can rapidly and easily bring back all the transactions that have taken place on the backup environment, so absolutely no data is lost.

The result

By upgrading from a traditional disaster recovery plan to Claranet's highly secure and available cloud recovery platform, the ASA has reduced the time taken to recover data following a disaster and gained seamless protection for its critical complaints management database.

“ We have cut our recovery time objective from more than four days to a few hours by working with Claranet to bring disaster recovery into the cloud.”

Bill Giles King - Systems Manager
Advertising Standards Authority

"Beyond faster recovery, the new environment gives us complete peace of mind that essential information is protected, which is priceless. The combination of IBM infrastructure and VMware technology gives us an enterprise-class platform for ensuring fail-safe disaster recovery, and Claranet's expertise means that the environment is always maintained at an optimum level."

The future

In the future, the ASA plans to gradually migrate more of its enterprise systems, including email, customer relationship management and document management applications, to Claranet's disaster recovery platform, ensuring end-to-end business continuity.

King concluded: "Having a dedicated recovery environment for our core systems will massively strengthen our business continuity. The flexibility and scalability of Claranet's DR solution makes it easy to extend the environment, so it can grow in line with our needs. "No business wants to experience a real disaster, but if we ever find ourselves in that situation we want to give ourselves the best chance of getting operations back up and running quickly. Joining forces with a strong partner like Claranet gives us that certainty."

For more information about Claranet's services, and the benefits these deliver, go to: www.claranet.co.uk