

With such a large and complex organization, it is obvious that you take disaster recovery seriously. Can you give us an overview of where Georgia Farm Bureau was previously and where you are today regarding your overall DR program?

GFBMIC: We had some aspects of a recovery program prior to coming to RES-Q™. We had a fairly well-established mainframe recovery program as well as network recovery that had been tested to some degree. Today we have demonstrated recovery on the Mainframe and AIX platforms, but we still have parts of our network and Windows infrastructure to build out and complete. We have not had full-blown tests on a newer broadband network we use for our county offices, and we have more work to do to complete our Wintel project. We are still missing large pieces of the puzzle and we are looking to RES-Q™ to help us.

Describe the number of physical tapes you previously had and how you have been able to migrate that tape data to virtual tape. How will the removal of physical tape devices and tape media impact your data center with the reclaimed space you have achieved?

GFBMIC: The team here at GFBMIC went through an extensive effort over the course of 6 months in 2012 to move the over 28,000 physical tapes in our environment to SecureAgent's virtual tape device. We made it through the process with only a handful of broken tapes which we immediately performed emergency recovery for. We completed the project in July and shredded all our physical tapes in August, a milestone that opened up a ton of space in our data center. We originally had 25 full tape racks and additionally stored several hundred cases of permanent tapes in an offsite facility, but by moving to a virtual tape device, we have opened up floor space that we can use as we upgrade our output processing.

A few years back, Georgia Farm Bureau went through a disaster recovery service provider selection process. Why did you choose RES-Q™?

GFBMIC: Our involvement with RES-Q™ was a perfect storm of things coming together. At the time, we were introducing the AIX platform into our environment and we were looking for recovery on that platform. Our current provider announced some changes to their environment, revealing they would no longer have all the equipment we needed for recovery available in one location. The thought of having to do Z recovery in one place and Windows in another while we were implementing new platforms was not appealing. The RES-Q™ team made a commitment to us that they could do recovery for all our platforms in one location and essentially sealed the deal. As a Georgia-based company, it did not make sense to be sending people elsewhere for testing. RES-Q™ recognized the importance of this to us and put together a solution that allowed us to recover all platforms in one location. They approached us as a partner in recovery rather than a customer and the commitment to providing a singular location for us meant a great deal as well as their dedication to flexibility and responsiveness.

What kind of cost savings or cost avoidances has GFB been able to achieve by deploying SecureAgent's Secure Data Solution for its mainframe data and recovery?

GFBMIC: Last year, we were at a point where we were either going to have to refresh our tape technology or make the choice to maintain what was already out of date. Either way, there was a good amount of cost involved. By moving to a virtual tape device, we are now saving about 80% a month on offsite storage and the ongoing costs for the virtual tape system are less than what we were paying for our previous tape solution. We did a test in July using this solution for recovery and did not have to transport tapes or bring any operations staff to deal with mounting the tapes. On a daily basis, my operations staff is freed from dealing with tape handling and can focus on other things. Not only has this solution provided cost savings, but has essentially simplified the entire testing process and our lives.

What has your experience with RES-Q™ Services been?

GFBMIC: Our experience with RES-Q™ has been very positive. We are very pleased with every interaction we have had with both the technical and sales teams. We were at the location in Norcross only two weeks ago, putting in some more equipment and the team is always ready to help. They bring a great mix of technical skills to the process and where they don't have them, they do not hesitate to go get them. They provide excellent support and a valuable partnership.

How has the deployment of the Secure Data Solution and the remote capabilities of RES-Q™ helped reduce your recovery objectives?

GFBMIC: The combination of these two solutions has definitely helped maximize the time on our recovery objectives. We no longer have to transport a bunch of tapes physically, which means we can get started faster and from any location, eliminating travel time. Once we get connections established, we can initiate parallel restores. We were previously limited by the number of available tape drives, but we can now initiate more than double the number of parallel restores of what we did before. Our restores also run much faster than a physical tape restore; we performed a test in July with times that absolutely blew the team away. We had our systems laid down and tapes restored in 2 hours versus the average of 5 hours of previous tests.

What is the biggest differentiator in your past provider and RES-Q™?

GFBMIC: Like I said previously, we just have a great partnership with the RES-Q™ team. There is a real sense of commitment to maintaining our healthy partnership and the GFBMIC team really appreciates that approach. Their flexibility is unparalleled and they go the extra mile to make sure they provide solutions that fit our business, not making us adjust the other way around.

How has your commitment to DR testing benefitted Georgia Farm Bureau in its day-to-day operations?

GFBMIC: This is difficult to describe. One benefit our commitment has provided is that going virtual has freed up our operational staff because there are no longer tapes to take care of. Our backups are better and because our backups are better, our recovery is more reliable. We do regular testing, which reveals problems in our backup process and allows us to constantly tweak and improve the backup process. Our backups are in much better shape because of the time we spend testing and improving our disaster recovery process.

How confident are you in your recovery process and procedures today?

GFBMIC: I am going to be bold and say that we are 99% confident on the recovery processes for our Z series platforms. We tested in June and had a very successful test. I have the same degree of confidence in our P series recovery as well. There are always challenges when you test because environments are constantly changing. However, we are always able to accomplish our goals within our SLAs and been able to bring up everything the way we want to. Our network and Windows recovery processes are still maturing, but we feel good about what is currently in place even though there are still gaps to close. We are focusing on closing those gaps in the next year to make sure we have complete recoverability. RES-Q™ has been so valuable to developing this process and their partnership and dedication allow our efforts to be as effective and educational as possible. We look to them to help us achieve reliable and successfully recovery.