



Customer Location
Houston, Texas

Industry
Oil and Gas

Platform
Microsoft Office SharePoint
Server 2007

Critical Needs

- Full-fidelity replication between globally dispersed SharePoint server farms and ships for disaster recovery and emergency purposes
- Ability to transmit up-to-date documentation to offshore ships
- Control over bandwidth usage when transmitting data to ships via satellite connections

AvePoint Solutions
DocAve Replicator

"DocAve provided a solution that satisfies our need for a disaster recovery plan and gives us the ability to replicate vital SharePoint data amongst our global server farms and ships."

-Miles Keller – SharePoint Administrator/Developer, Helix Energy Solutions Group, Inc.

Case Study: Helix Energy Solutions Replicates Data and Content to Geo-Distributed SharePoint Farms & Sea Vessels with DocAve®

Success Highlights

- Replicated 1.2 terabytes of SharePoint data across server farms in the United States and United Kingdom, as well as four offshore ships
- Developed a disaster recovery plan to avoid business disruption if one server farm goes down
- Sent up-to-date documentation such as equipment manuals and environmental and safety procedures electronically to four of the company's offshore vessels through SharePoint, helping alleviate the need to fax or transport documents via helicopter
- Controlled satellite bandwidth-usage when replicating SharePoint data to ships using throttle-control capabilities

Customer Profile

Helix Energy Solutions Group, Inc. provides life-of-field services and development solutions to offshore energy producers worldwide. Helix actively reduces finding and development costs through a unique mix of offshore production assets, service methodologies, and highly skilled personnel.

The Challenge

With personnel spread throughout offices across the globe and ships at sea, Helix required a software platform upon which employees could collaborate, communicate, and access up-to-date content from the organization. Helix chose Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 and its employees quickly adopted the platform, utilizing it heavily for their day-to-day business operations. Helix uses SharePoint for collaboration, document storage, and designing its intranet website. The company also uses the platform on four of its ships, which regularly travel across the globe, from the Gulf of Mexico to The North Sea and beyond.



Helix's SharePoint environment currently holds 1.2 terabytes of data and is backed by two separate server farms. The main farm is located in Houston, TX, where the company is headquartered, and consists of one SQL server, two web front end servers, an index server, and an extranet server. This farm is accessed by approximately 1,100 end-users located throughout the world. The Helix farm is made up of two fully replicated instances between Houston, Texas and Aberdeen, Scotland. Users in the Eastern Hemisphere access the Aberdeen data center and users in the Western Hemisphere access the Houston data center. Between the two farms, hundreds of business-critical documents are created, updated, and added to SharePoint every day. Finally, each of the company's four main ships has one Windows SharePoint Services server on board, which enables access to the platform at sea via satellite.

While Helix's adoption and overall use of SharePoint went smoothly from the outset, a natural disaster occurred and caused problems for the company's deployment. In 2009, Hurricane Ike swept across Texas and knocked out the power in Houston. Since SharePoint's native abilities will only allow a farm to be split in multiple locations and not duplicated, Helix's entire global SharePoint environment went down with the farm in Houston.

Since the Gulf region is a prime target for hurricanes, Helix administrators were certain they needed to find a way to avoid another catastrophe. With this in mind, administrators set out to find a third-party software solution able to synchronize multiple farms with the critical information stored in SharePoint.

The AvePoint Solution

After researching third-party solutions, Helix administrators chose AvePoint's DocAve Replicator. Part of the DocAve's fully integrated suite of solutions, DocAve Replicator allows data and settings to be moved, replicated, and synchronized across multiple SharePoint farms. It does so while

retaining the data's full fidelity, including all metadata, properties, and securities. Helix administrators proceeded to add dedicated DocAve servers to the company's U.S. and UK farms.

While DocAve offers the option to replicate content on a scheduled basis, Helix administrators opted to perform replications in real time. "DocAve allowed us to mirror our entire U.S. farm to our farm in the UK and perform regular two-way replications, ensuring all data remains in sync," said Miles Keller, Helix's SharePoint Administrator/Developer. "If one farm goes down for maintenance or another disaster occurs, DocAve enables our global network of end-users to access SharePoint from the other farm, ensuring that business continues without disruption."

Beyond replicating SharePoint data and content between the U.S. and UK farms, DocAve also enabled administrators to keep the SharePoint environments on four of its ships in sync with the main server farms. This has enhanced Helix's ability to maintain documentation such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements and ensures the most up-to-date and complete documentation is available on the vessels. "DocAve allows us to transmit documentation to our ships quickly and easily through SharePoint sites," Keller said. "All of our vessels need to meet regional and global standards with safety and operational documentation. DocAve is the key tool for maintaining legally required documentation on board while modifying documents as needed on shore. DocAve helps guarantee the proper documentation is always on-hand."

Since each energy company's satellite system is unique, a slight modification to DocAve was needed in order to enable throttle-control with Helix's system.

Administrators enlisted AvePoint's global technical support team for the job. AvePoint Support returned with a customized solution that fixed the issue much faster than administrators expected. "Many software companies I deal with will not deliver a custom patch when needed and will simply wait to address the issue with the next version of their product," Keller said.



"AvePoint's fast and dedicated technical support was a major differentiator for us."

The Bottom Line

As a global organization with knowledge-workers in multiple locations, Helix found great value in SharePoint and its ability to store content and enhance collaboration. With DocAve, Helix is able to replicate its SharePoint data between its two separate farms to keep data in synch and allow uninterrupted access to the platform for all end-users worldwide, even after one farm goes down. Additionally, Helix could ensure its ships had access to up-to-date documentation at sea through SharePoint, making the transmission of mission-critical information much simpler and allowing the company to safely operate its global fleet and maintain required legal documentation on board.

In the near future, Helix administrators will begin to plan a migration to SharePoint 2010. Once the upgrade is complete, Helix will continue to utilize DocAve. "DocAve will continue to play a major role in our SharePoint deployment," Keller said. "DocAve provides a solution that fully satisfies our need for a disaster recovery plan and gives us the ability to replicate vital SharePoint data amongst our global server farms and ships."

About AvePoint

AvePoint is a global technology company and proven software leader. Since its founding in 2001, AvePoint has become one of the world's largest providers of lifecycle management software solutions for SharePoint, offering a fully integrated solution for SharePoint lifecycle management. Propelled by one of the world's largest SharePoint-exclusive research & development teams, AvePoint helps more than 8,000 customers – including many Fortune 500 companies and government agencies – meet their specific

business objectives by unleashing SharePoint's full potential. AvePoint, Inc. is headquartered and maintains its principle engineering center in Jersey City, NJ, with wholly owned sales and engineering centers in the USA, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Singapore, and China. AvePoint is a Depth Managed Microsoft Gold Certified Portals and Collaboration Partner and Gold Certified ISV Partner as well as US Government GSA provider via strategic partnerships.

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