

SMITH BROTHERS STORES LTD



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Peter Hulcoop, IT Manager, Smith Brothers Stores

When a near disaster prompted Smith Brothers Stores to review their Disaster Recovery Plan, they turned to Maxava HA to deliver the comprehensive solution they needed to protect their business.

THE BUSINESS NEED

UK industrial supply company Smith Brothers Stores (www.sbs.co.uk) experienced a mini-disaster affecting their IBM i which triggered a review of their Disaster Recovery plan. A power substation close to their Leicester location went out of commission causing severe power interruption and brown-out conditions. Historically, their approach had been a tape based solution and a backup machine in a separate location 40 miles from their primary location, which proved to be less than satisfactory when the plan was triggered.

With the local power substation ablaze and power interruption stretching from hours to potentially days, Smith Brothers' plan was activated but this still put them a minimum of a day behind in being able to capture, process and fulfil the needs of the business. “It was important for us to be able to use the back-up machine without a day's lapse in availability. The key to any recovery is speed and we needed to find a high availability solution that was more feasible for a company of this size” says Peter Hulcoop, IT Manager.

Smith Brothers Stores runs Accord Focus on their IBM i environment, a full ERP suite that supports the company's users across 9 different locations nationally. With an active inventory system and online sales to support also, the company would be unable to respond effectively if it were to need to rely on manual systems. In terms of scale of effect, a conservative estimate from Gartner pegs the hourly cost of downtime for computer networks at \$42,000.

With the clarity brought about by such an impactful outside event the team needed to act. The power sub-station fire served as a great example of how quickly events could transpire to affect the business. Through local business partner, CHH Consulting, the Smith Brothers Stores team identified that Maxava HA Enterprise+

would deliver the peace of mind they required for a comprehensive answer to their business continuity needs.

UNDERSCORING THE VALUE OF MAXAVA HA

Two weeks after Smith Brothers had gone live with Maxava HA Enterprise+, the company required a maintenance change of a disk controller in their production system. What should have been a routine replacement by their Hardware Maintenance Supplier engineer resulted in the loss of most of their disk. “There was a fault on the IBM i and the people from our Hardware Maintenance Supplier said it could be fixed in a day. It was down for more than 3 weeks”, comments Peter Hulcoop, adding “Without Maxava we would have been in dire straits. There's no two ways about it, it would have meant a minimum of 2-3 days of downtime to our business without Maxava HA. Machines simply go down when you don't want them to and this event happened at the end of the day, the worst possible time for us”

Despite being set up for Role Swap and Failover with Maxava HA, Smith Brothers Stores had never actually tested the process and had little choice but to move to their back-up system. The irony of this is they had planned to do a failover test the very next weekend.

As Peter explains, “We were going to test the system before doing a role swap test and didn't have a chance to do this before the production system failure. After the production system failure we were hesitant to simply move to the target machine but had invaluable help from the Maxava technical team. They were absolutely excellent and talked us through the process and in no more than one hour we were back up on the target machine, including the network”.

With help from the Maxava team, the company successfully ran for 3 weeks on their back-up system and after some challenging times during a reload from old tape media copies and some more help

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from Maxava in aligning accumulated data, Smith Brothers were able to plan a controlled role swap back. Had they not installed Maxava HA just weeks prior to this incident, the company would have experienced a much more significant impact to its business. “If we were down for any length of time it would dramatically impact our revenues. We could deliver physical product but we could not produce invoices, which when dealing with order sizes from hundreds to thousands of pounds per order...well, you get the picture” shares Peter. “Once we failed over we knew within seconds that the data was fully replicated and we were only missing a few

seconds at most. We didn’t lose any data or any transactions – Maxava delivers incredibly swift replication” he added.

In addition to Maxava HA working like clockwork, the Smith Brothers Stores team enjoy the added flexibility of maxView Manager from iPhone to check the status of the replication software which requires minimal management and feel very fortunate they made the decision to purchase the Maxava HA suite.

Says Peter Hulcoop, “Thank goodness we bought Maxava when we did – given the circumstances, we all breathed a huge sigh of relief when it worked successfully at a critical moment for us”