

Commentary

April 12, 2005

Mimosa Systems: Getting to the Point with NearPoint

Face it. Making sure that Microsoft Exchange delivers the productivity-enhancing availability that end users need, managing the seemingly uncontrollable growth in Exchange databases, and finding a way to satisfy compliance requirements is difficult. How do you deal with these three challenges? Mimosa Systems' NearPoint Server has an answer. The NearPoint server all-in-one solution deals with all three challenges simultaneously through unified e-mail data management, without forcing users to cobble together disparate systems that do not talk to one another.

Can't Live With It, Can't Live Without It

Your e-mail system is the de rigeur electronic glue that facilitates both intra- and inter-organizational communication and coordination. Living without Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Exchange for any long period of time is simply unthinkable. Keeping the Microsoft Exchange environment available and delivering on its promises can be very challenging.

Three critical challenges that organizations continually face are:

- *The availability challenge* — tape systems alone cannot recover data as quickly as many organizations would like at the Exchange database level nor easily allow the recovery of individual mailbox items.
- *The challenge of corralling unchecked storage growth* — letting storage grow unfettered is not acceptable, but pruning alternatives leave a lot to be desired.

- *The compliance and litigation support challenge* — enterprises must face up more and more to mandatory retention, disposition management, and litigation mandated search of selected mailbox-related data.

One Size Does Fit All

Attempts to meet those challenges have tended to involve multiple products that want to create their own individual pools of storage. Individually, each may be a fine solution; collectively Exchange administrators would find them unacceptable.

That does not have to be. The key is to understand that these challenges are all data management service issues.

According to SNIA (Storage Networking Industry Association), data management services are those services that deliver "control of data from the time it is conceived until it no longer exists." These services focus on the basic functions of data protection and active (i.e., online)

Commentary

archiving as well as the methods that are used to achieve those functions, such as migration and replication.

Mimosa Systems has delivered a data management software solution that can be tuned to meet all three data management challenges simultaneously. Three for one is a good deal. And all of this is accomplished with *a single* pool of storage, *a single* data capture method, *a single* administrator console, and *a single* cataloging and index scheme.

NearPoint — Point Guard for Microsoft Exchange

The Mimosa NearPoint™ for Microsoft® Exchange Server delivers both data protection and active archiving services for e-mail in one seamless package that in combination addresses all three challenges. The term “unified e-mail data management” truly applies to it. The NearPoint Server can be viewed logically as an invisible extension (and empowerment) of the Exchange Server environment.

NearPoint Server is a software-only solution that runs on a standard Intel server using storage that can be directly attached (DAS), a storage area network (SAN), or network-attached storage (NAS). Its deep integration with Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Exchange results in a zero footprint, as there are no agents or drivers to install on Exchange servers, nor any clients that need to be deployed to the desktop. Administrators can interface with the NearPoint Server through the familiar Microsoft Management Console (MMC).

One Product Serves Multiple Data Management Needs

The NearPoint Server serves three distinct stakeholders — productivity-driven end users, cost- and service-oriented IT organizations, and compliant-enforcing legal and human resource organizations. NearPoint meets the needs of each of these groups (Table 1).

Table 1: NearPoint Satisfies Multiple Interests

Goal	Stakeholder		
	IT	End User	Compliance Officer
Availability	Keep everyone happy with high service levels. No more productivity- and time-draining single item searches.	Don't have to depend on and wait on IT to find what is needed. Data is really never lost.	Don't have to explain why data cannot be retrieved in a timely manner.
Storage corraling	Free at last from having to be the quota imposing Grinch.	No quota management or *.PST headaches.	Single instancing means only one copy to manage.
Compliance and Litigation Support	Satisfy a business requirement.	Don't have to worry about accidental deletions	Be able to sleep at night.

Source: Mesabi Group April 2005

Commentary

Making a Quick Recovery

A key data protection goal for Exchange is higher availability. That higher availability can be measured in two ways:

- *Time* — recovery that is measured in seconds or minutes rather than the hours or days that are likely to be the case with tape.
- *Scope* — restoration at three levels is essential: the database level that affects all users, the whole mailbox level that affects an individual, and the lowest-level-of-granularity individual mailbox item.

The data protection function of the NearPoint Server maintains a near-real-time application shadow copy of the Exchange database(s). NearPoint Server's "secret sauce" for non-intrusive and continuous replication of data is in the ability to capture Exchange transaction logs. This is in contrast to alternatives that require the use of Exchange "journaling" that administrators avoid like the plague because of performance and scalability problems.

The NearPoint Server's shadow data copy represents an '*application-aware*' continuous data protection against both logical (say, database corruption or accidental deletion) and physical (say, bad disk blocks) problems on an Exchange server.

At Your (Self) Service

Most Exchange data protection problems translate into painfully-difficult retrieval of individual mailbox items that have been lost or that have slipped beyond easy reach because you forgot where you placed it.

The NearPoint Server fully indexes all content and provides a '*Google-like*' search capability to find lost or misplaced mailbox items — no need to wait for WinFS or install a point tool.

The NearPoint Server's end user interface integrates seamlessly into Microsoft Outlook so that end users can search and retrieve those mailbox items (not just e-mails) that have been backed up, archived, or migrated to the NearPoint Server. This transparency with the look and feel of Microsoft Outlook translates into user acceptance, as there is no additional learning curve.

Corralling Unchecked Storage Growth

Exchange storage requirements tend to grow exponentially for two reasons:

- *Accumulation* — additions are normal, subtractions require hard work.
- *Density* — e-mails themselves are not storage-intensive individually, but ever-more-common attachments are weighty.

Exchange administrators typically must impose individual mailbox quotas in order to maintain acceptable server performance and to prevent having to beg constantly for more storage. Quotas either require users making draconian choices on what to save and what to delete (with the risk of error) or creating .PST stores that are difficult to manage and access efficiently.

Using NearPoint, IT's first approach to this problem can be to apply NearPoint's mailbox extension function, which enables attachments to migrate to more cost-effective storage according to policy, such as age or size (but, from an end user's perspective, each and every

Commentary

mailbox item is still easily and quickly accessible from Outlook). The now-slimmed-down Exchange Servers enjoy improved performance and operational efficiency.

The second approach is to eliminate old data that would have been put in Exchange, relying instead on the same data in the NearPoint archive, but with the same ease of access from Outlook as before.

Compliance and Litigation Support

At a high level, data compliance is simply the imposition of a layer of software control on top of a pool of storage to determine *who* can modify or delete *what* data and *when*, *where*, and *how*, within the scope of mandatory data retention and disposition policies.

The NearPoint Server delivers the key software elements that a compliance solution requires.

- *Categorization* — mailbox items that fall under compliance constraints have to be clearly identified, indexed and cataloged into the proper protection boxes.
- *Retrieval* — data must remain accessible and getting only the data that is needed and getting it back in a reasonable time is a combination of the NearPoint QuickSearch and Advanced Search capability.

- *Policy Enforcement* — the pool of storage is under the control of intelligent NearPoint Server software that enables the carrying out of the retention and disposition policies as well as preserving inalterability and recording the chain of custody.

From an end user or Exchange administrator perspective, the data is always there and — with the proper permissions — viewable, printable, and serviceable as the basis for copying. But deletion of data is reserved to higher level corporate policies.

Conclusions

Breathes there an Exchange administrator who does not face on a daily basis the pressures of mailbox growth run wild and the demands of end users for finding individual “lost” mailbox items ... not to mention burgeoning requirements for compliance and litigation support? The archiving and data protection functions of NearPoint Server meet all of these needs.

Getting a three-in-one solution as a unified data management approach with NearPoint Server is something which every Exchange administrator will want to give careful consideration.

David Hill

Analyst Name: David Hill
Topic Area: Storage Management

Mesabi Group LLC
26 Country Lane
Westwood, MA 02090
www.valleyviewventures.com

Mesabi Group LLC is an affiliate of Valley View Ventures that aims to provide thought leadership and sound advice to both vendors and users of information technology.

Phone: (781) 326-0038
email the author: davidhill@mesabigroup.com

The information contained in this publication has been obtained from sources Mesabi Group LLC believes to be reliable, but is not warranted by Mesabi Group LLC. Commentary opinions reflect the analyst's judgment at the time and are subject to change without notice. Unless otherwise noted, the entire contents of this publication are copyrighted by Mesabi Group LLC, and may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written consent by Mesabi Group LLC