



Success Story

SIMMONS & SIMMONS

Simmons & Simmons proves that Overland Storage NEO 8000 tape library exceeds expectations

Challenges:

- Need for absolute data control and security
- Preference for tape as component of data security
- Rising data growth
- Requirement for highly expandable solution
- Need for standardisation of backup, disaster recovery, archiving to replace individual office arrangements
- Cost reduction

Solution:

- NEO 8000

Benefits:

- Reliability
- Disk comparable speeds
- Immediate integration with SAN / NAS hardware and software
- Flexibility soon demonstrated
- Greatly expandable for future change and growth
- Key component within IT rationalise/refresh project towards achieving tighter control and cost effectiveness

Reseller:

Vohkus Ltd
www.vohkus.com

www.simmons-simmons.com

Leading international law firm Simmons & Simmons has grown to its present strength both organically through business success over many decades and by merging with other firms similarly well established in their own countries. Its largest offices are in London, Rotterdam and Hong Kong, with more in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States — 21 altogether.

'Our decision to go for an 'industrial strength' tape library was vindicated! It gives us the flexibility that we need to be able to change things.'

Peter Attwood, chief technical officer,
Simmons & Simmons

From an IT point of view such a picture implies numerous challenges. Lawyers generate documents, the latest versions of which can be needed immediately at all the offices involved with a piece of work — for example, an international buyout where Simmons & Simmons lawyers, in various countries, are working concurrently. There is heavy emphasis on all aspects of data security, and documents and emails must be retained and archived for client and/or compliance purposes for seven years or often more.

The firm's expansion into new locations led to individual IT arrangements such as document management application servers being deployed in single offices, complete with local data backup arrangements, and with business success contributing to ever-rising volumes of data, the time came to address these and other issues. Simmons & Simmons is doing this with a major rationalisation of infrastructure and systems known internally as 'Programme Vanilla'.

The Challenge

Peter Attwood is Simmons & Simmons' chief technical officer. He explains: "Programme Vanilla is a complete refresh and modernisation of both our desktops and our back end services."

Part way through the ambitious eighteen-month implementation timescale, Vanilla is starting to provide the lawyers with Interwoven document management software integrated with Exchange and Outlook at their desktops. Meanwhile, information storage is being consolidated into three data centres at the London, Rotterdam and Hong Kong offices.

The overall aims are for better facilities, reduced costs and tighter control, with streamlined data backup, storage and recovery, archiving and disaster recovery being major parts of the plan.

The Solution

Simmons & Simmons chose a storage area network (SAN) solution from Pillar Data Systems to manage data replication among the three new data centres for provision of real time copies. The last copy in every case is sent to London. Here the data is written onto tapes for offsite safe keeping. For this the firm acquired a new Overland Storage NEO 8000 tape library, complete with LTO3 technology and tape barcoding, from UK reseller Vohkus. In the new SAN regime the centrally based NEO 8000 will replace all the smaller tape units previously deployed in the various countries.

Peter Attwood explains that for all aspects of the new storage infrastructure, expandability was essential. "When we entered into the Vanilla project we didn't really know what our data sizes were going to be," he recalls.

Part way through Vanilla, his data estimate is of 40 terabytes in London. At completion, he foresees a further 30 TB in Rotterdam and 20 TB in Hong Kong (all figures including local copies). He also predicts the inevitability of more data growth. A colleague's recommendation for Overland made much of the NEO tape libraries' flexibility and capacity for ready expansion.



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Document security is enormously important. "Losing anything would be totally unacceptable to our clients and hugely embarrassing," he comments. "We pride ourselves on never doing so." Reliability was therefore another key criterion in the purchase of the NEO 8000.

Some of the solutions proposed for Vanilla had included disk-only backup and storage. "What makes me slightly nervous about the idea of tapeless backup is that the backup disks are still spinning, so they can still be written to." For Peter Attwood this raises concerns of terrorist or other threats, not least that "We have to be doubly secure because we are human and we make mistakes". Given his overall aim — reducing the likelihood of data loss to as near impossibility as is achievable — he finds comfort in the presence of tapes at the end of the new storage procedures.

"Our decision to stick with tapes but rationalise into one place and upgrade to the "latest and greatest" was based around the fact that once you have written a tape, verified that it is good, and sent it off site, it's pretty safe."

Another important consideration for the chosen tape library was that it had to be compatible with the firm's new storage area network (SAN). Here again the NEO 8000 scored full marks. "It plugged directly into the SAN fabric."

Following very easy installation, the NEO 8000 went into service, with Symantec BackUp Exec software managing the tape catalogue. Peter Attwood comments: "It was immediately obvious that the equipment fulfilled the promises made for it — which in our line of business isn't that common. It sounds slightly trite to say so, but it is one of the reasons why we went for it."

Benefits

Simmons & Simmons has seen the NEO 8000 exceed initial expectations. Being fed data by fibre the tape library is working even more speedily than anticipated. Peter Attwood says: "We're achieving quite phenomenal backup rates — 60 gigabytes to a tape in 40 minutes, and reading back at between 5 and 7.5 gigabytes a minute. Also we're getting almost double the compression. On a 400 GB tape we're storing about 800 GB of data."

Also, the NEO 8000 has won its way to a new level of usefulness. A feature of the SAN solution is its deployment of different parts of server disks to deliver different speeds of service, e.g. outer area for fast access items such as Exchange logs, inner area for archiving or other data written only slowly and occasionally. The original Vanilla plan had been to use the inner area for overnight backups. But as the project has progressed, system traffic started to build up, data volumes continued to grow more rapidly than had been foreseen, and these backups were starting to become too time-consuming.

At this point, Simmons & Simmons could have decided to buy extra disks specifically for backup use, or even another solution. Instead, they found their earlier decisions to purchase highly flexible products really paying off.

"We wanted to keep life simple. Also the best solution was there already. The throughput and the reliability of the tape library are so good it's almost behaving like a disk drive!" Peter Attwood was delighted when his team suggested using the tape library not only for creating the tapes to be taken offsite, but also for overnight backups, keeping those tapes locally. They could then copy from tape to tape to get the high throughput, they told him — and they had tested it all out in order to provide figures proving that it would work.

"We could do that because we are not frightened of running out of anything," he says. "Our decision to go for an "industrial strength" tape library was vindicated! It gives us the flexibility that we need to be able to change things" — perhaps the most useful benefit of all.

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About Overland Storage

Overland Storage is a market leader and innovative provider of simply protected storage solutions – smart data protection appliances and software modules designed to work together, affordably, to ensure that information is automatically safe, readily available and always there. Overland's award-winning data protection solutions include the ULTAMUS SERIES™ of protected primary storage appliances; the REO SERIES™ of disk-based backup and recovery appliances; and the NEO SERIES® of tape libraries. Overland sells its products through leading OEMs, commercial distributors, storage integrators and value-added resellers. For more information, visit Overland's web site at www.overlandstorage.com.

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