Case Study

ORANGEBURG COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Orangeburg County, a largely rural county centrally located within the state, encompasses 17 municipalities and a population of approximately 98,000.

THE BUSINESS NEED

Since 9-11, disaster preparedness has become the dominant focus of government at all levels. And four years later, Hurricane Katrina made that focus even more acute for those governmental entities serving coastal populations.

One critical measure of disaster preparedness is the degree to which essential public safety and administration data is safeguarded, compelling officials to audit existing IT infrastructures for potential disaster recovery deficiencies. One such audit, conducted by Orangeburg County in 2006, highlighted concern about the county's untested disaster recovery system: two IBM Power i servers, both located within the county's administrative complex. One server is dedicated solely to public safety and the second houses public administration and acts also as redundant backup for Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD).

According to Gary Forkel, Orangeburg's IT Director, the county lacked the capacity to ever properly test the system. "We performed tape back ups on a nightly basis but never had the time to shut everybody down, so we never tested it," he says. "We don't have a secondary machine in the background just in case, so it was virtually impossible to prepare for a temporary hardware failure, much less a large scale disaster."

In the event of a loss of either or both of his servers, Forkel estimated it would take 5-7 working days to receive and configure a replacement server, restore the back up and re-key data not permanently lost.

THE DECISION

Entrusting critical data, ranging from financials, tax records and payroll to crime records to the integrity of an untested disaster recovery system was unacceptable. Forkel enlisted the help of Lake Mary, Florida-based SunGard Public Sector (SPS), Orangeburg's long-time provider of software and consulting solutions and certified reseller of Maximum Availability's *noMAX garrison HA/DR solution.

"Our clients know we've evaluated several competing HA/DR products and that we're convinced *noMAX is not only extremely robust, but it's the best fit for our product line," says Sue Dumas, SPS's Implementation Project Manager. "We understand how *noMAX interacts during replication with our products." Dumas points out that her company is certified to implement *noMAX and provide first-level support.

THE OUTCOME

Orangeburg utilizes *noMAX for real-time replication of public administration and public safety data - including the CAD Redundancy product - from both of the county's servers to two LPARs residing at the SPS facility in Florida. Additionally, Forkel uses *noMAX as Orangeburg continues performing nightly system backups and monthly IPLs on both servers.

Otherwise, Forkel's interaction with *noMAX is limited to periodic status checks to ensure there are no problems with replication. "We haven't had to put it to use yet – not in a live scenario – but because we're so dependent on our SPS applications to do our job, it's critical to be up 24/7. *noMAX gives us that peace-of-mind." SunGard Public Sector facilitates Forkel's limited administrative interaction with *noMAX by providing all monitoring services. The company also conducts periodic role-swap tests and ongoing replication checks as the county updates or makes changes to its public administration and safety systems.

Hurricane Hanna

*noMAX and SPS stood poised for that live disaster scenario in September 2008, as South Carolina fell in the expected path of Hurricane Hanna. "With the advance warning, we did some preliminary testing of the *noMAX replication and held extensive meetings with emergency services to ensure everybody knew our back-up plan," says Forkel.

SunGard Public Sector mobilized as well. "As any potential disaster scenario unfolds we're monitoring the replication to ensure it is up to date and we're monitoring *noMAX a little closer to ensure that we can role swap on a moment's notice," says Dumas. "[Forkel] was in very close contact with our group and with users, outlining the protocol for accessing the backup system here in Lake Mary." That system is accessible to any user credentialed by the county via any PC with Internet capabilities.

Fortunately, Orangeburg avoided the brunt of Hanna, but his close call and subsequent real-world experience with *noMAX and SPS in an imminent disaster has reinforced Forkel's confidence. "I am very secure in knowing that if the public safety building is destroyed we can go to any location, connect to the SunGard Public Sector servers and access the real-time data replicated through *noMAX in 20-30 minutes max."

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Gary Forkel, IT Director
Orangeburg County