Grey County Reimagines Cloud and Disaster Recovery

How a municipal government streamlined processes and saved with Zerto and Microsoft Azure

Solution: Cloud mobility with Azure Disaster Recovery Migration

Country: Canada

Industry: Government

About Grey County

Situated two hours north of Toronto, Ontario, Grey County is an upper-tier municipal government agency that encompasses nine municipalities set in a verdant landscape. Headquartered in Owen Sound, the county is known for the natural beauty and rich recreational opportunities that have made tourism and agriculture two of its primary industries. Its more than 96,000 residents receive wide-ranging services from the county, including long-term care, roads and transportation, paramedic services, social services, and many others.

Challenges

- Modernize IT infrastructure, particularly backup and disaster recovery
- Satisfy taxpayers with a solution that provides maximum reliability and flexibility for a cost-effective price
- Improve a two-week downtime risk and eight-week system recovery time
- Achieve peace of mind with a modern, fast, and affordable data protection solution

Solution

- Work with consulting firm CDW to deploy data protection with Zerto, a Hewlett Packard Enterprise company
- Use Zerto for data protection integrated with Microsoft Azure's cloud-based storage
- Generate detailed failover reports for monitoring, compliance, and council debriefs

Results

Install Zerto and go online in less than a week

Achieve RTOs of minutes and RPOs within hours—all with no data loss

Streamline backup/recovery overhead, from a 13-person IT team to one managing Zerto from his phone

Realize savings of more than 25 percent, ahead of the 5-year savings projection target

Seeking Enterprise-Grade, Cost-Effective IT Performance

Grey County faced a quandary well known to budget-conscious regional governments around the world: it needed to deliver enterprise-grade IT performance, free from disruptions, at an affordable price. The county also wanted to modernize its data protection strategy to ensure continuous availability for critical services like ambulances, no matter what.

"Government organizations like ours are often stretched thin, and each agency consists of a lot of small businesses, in a sense. Zerto and Azure met all our varied, demanding requirements. They just work together seamlessly."
—Evan Davis, IT Infrastructure and Security Manager, Grey County

When they assessed their previous BC/DR system, the Grey County IT team realized that a serious system failure could result in at least two weeks of downtime—a time frame clearly unacceptable for mission-critical services like long-term care and life safety systems. That's why the county chose Microsoft Azure as its cloud platform along with Zerto, the highly compatible cloud data management and protection solution. With initial projected savings upwards of 25 percent over the next five years—far exceeding that of any other solution—the county is now serving residents more safely, cost-effectively, and with priceless peace of mind.

Survey Uncovers Need for Improved Availability

Grey County IT Infrastructure and Security Manager Evan Davis has a simple performance goal. "Everything has to be up all the time, and we can't lose anything," he says. "And we need the right balance of affordability and ease of use."

A 2019 survey of Grey County's IT landscape was less than reassuring. The county was backing up more than 100 diverse systems nightly to an on-premises server at the Owen Sound headquarters.

While the redundancy between offices enhanced backup safety, restoration didn't meet the county's performance standards. Grey County requires a recovery time objective (RTO) of 24 hours or less for some business systems, while others can't afford downtime at all. But Davis's team estimated that in the event of a ransomware attack or other disaster, restoring systems could take up to two weeks.

The team also considered their recovery point objective (RPO), the maximum amount of time their system could remain offline after a disruptive event. They agreed that the RPO for their least critical system was no more than a couple of hours.

Davis faced a complex decision. He had to stay accountable to the county's elected officials (and, ultimately, the taxpayer) while balancing the costs of a disaster with the expense of each potential solution. He was acutely conscious that this new system would set a precedent for the time and expense the county would be obligated to carry indefinitely.

Assessing Three Different Approaches

The team mapped out three general approaches to upgrade their infrastructure. The first approach required applying for county funds to build a new data center that would mirror its existing data center at headquarters, providing the redundancy Grey County needed. But even without accounting for staff time to monitor and maintain the equipment, this approach would incur the county a substantial capital cost.

The second approach opted for data migration to the cloud, accepting costs for both the cloud service subscription and the costs involved in working with a consultant to establish the environment and train staff. In this scenario, the county would also buy and self-manage the data protection software.

In the last approach, the county evaluated disaster recovery as a service (DRaaS). This required a cloud platform that could support a fully managed service—one that would manage the cloud resources needed to sustain the Grey County computing environment, replicate systems, maintain the platform, monitor performance, and assist in restoring the environment in the event of a disaster.

While the DRaaS option provided easier management and some cost savings, Grey County ultimately chose the second approach, to self-manage their cloud. Performance was the most important factor in the decision, followed by affordability. This approach provided the biggest overall cost savings, as well as the overall simplicity and ease involved in deploying and managing Zerto's solution.

Finding Synergy with Zerto and Azure

After the county evaluated cloud platforms and disaster recovery solutions in detail, they found an unambiguous leader: Microsoft Azure and Zerto, a highly flexible disaster recovery solution that seamlessly connects with Azure. This approach provided the biggest overall cost savings, as well as easy deployment and management due to Zerto's simplicity.

Over a two-week period in January 2020, Grey County worked with the IT consulting firm CDW to deploy Azure and Zerto.

"We chose Microsoft Azure because it was a reliable platform that we wouldn't have to worry about, and it made the most economic sense," explains Davis. "It met our criteria for maximum ease of use and minimal management effort."

Azure also meshed perfectly with the Microsoft 365 environment the county was already using, including Exchange, Teams, Azure Active Directory, and all the other Microsoft 365 services. "Migrating to Azure was a strategic step that made us future-ready for any other initiative we may want to roll out," says Davis.

The Grey County team chose Zerto for its leadership in disaster recovery and continuous data protection. Traditional backup software schedules begin at a designated time and run for several hours during a non-peak usage period (usually at night), meaning that there could be significant gaps between the time of a disaster and the point where the restored data began. "Because the Zerto solution replicates data continuously, we can retrieve data from a recovery point that's six seconds prior," says Davis. "It was the only solution that met all of our criteria, and it was also the most cost-effective option."

"It's all working so seamlessly with Microsoft Azure and Zerto, we're now considering better protection of our Microsoft SaaS-based applications with Zerto Backup for SaaS powered by Keepit. It's the logical next step in our journey," says Davis.

Gaining Advantage from the Best of Both Solutions

The Grey County IT team also uses Zerto reporting capabilities for proactive information, so Davis doesn't have to worry about staying close to the system to be informed. "I use the Zerto app on my phone to pull detailed reports," he says. "I have similar capability with Azure; I can get detailed data on our consumption and the state of the system. It's easy to see what's being replicated and backed up, the actual RTOs and RPOs, and numerous other data, whether for monitoring, compliance reporting, or providing information to council executives." He also appreciates that he can pull structured reports from Azure and Microsoft 365 to help ensure that compliance stays on track.

Operationally, the difference between the current hybrid environment and their pre-migration, completely on-premises world is striking. "Maintaining and backing up our systems occupied most of our 13-person team full time," says Davis. "Now, I can maintain Zerto myself. We've taken what was a rather haphazard collection of operations run by multiple people to a very organized process that's easily managed by a team of one. Making changes in Zerto is fast and easy."

Recovering from operational mishaps—a bad patch or an issue with an upgrade, for example—is easier with Zerto and Azure. "If we need to migrate a server from one system to another, it's much easier now with Zerto," says Davis. "Thanks to the interoperability with Azure and Zerto, though, we've had minimal reason to take advantage of that capability. The biggest benefit is the peace of mind."

The county also knows that support is there whenever it needs, which hasn't been often. "The Zerto engineers are very knowledgeable, and they've given us invaluable help," says Davis.

Ultimately, Davis believes that Grey County's approach is ideal for any governmental entity. With streamlined management, improved recovery times, detailed reporting, and significant cost savings, Zerto and Azure are delivering Grey County's vision for a modernized infrastructure that satisfies municipal stakeholders.

"Government organizations like ours are often stretched thin, and each agency consists of a lot of small businesses, in a sense," Davis says. "Zerto and Azure met all our varied, demanding requirements. They just work together seamlessly."

To learn more about trusted and compliant data protection for government agencies, please visit the [Zerto for Government website](#).

About Zerto

Zerto, a Hewlett Packard Enterprise company, empowers customers to run an always-on business by simplifying the protection, recovery, and mobility of on-premises and cloud applications. Zerto eliminates the risk and complexity of modernization and cloud adoption across private, public, and hybrid deployments. The simple, software-only solution uses continuous data protection at scale to solve for ransomware resilience, disaster recovery, and multi-cloud mobility. Zerto is trusted by over 9,500 customers globally and is powering offerings for Amazon, Google, IBM, Microsoft, and Oracle and more than 350 managed service providers. **www.zerto.com**

Copyright 2023 Zerto. All information may be subject to change.