



Antares and Mainstar

Achieving Highly Effective
Resiliency and Availability

Ken Rodger

Antares, a rapidly rising star in the outsourcing industry, faces the challenge of providing nonstop data availability while ensuring business resiliency for its clients. With data access solutions from Mainstar, Antares is able to meet its objectives – and minimize expenses.

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Maintaining peak system and application performance and availability is critical to our ability to provide the best quality service.

Downtime is not an option.

When companies rely on you to provide round-the-clock reliability and business resiliency, you need complete certainty that their data is safe and available.

Antares Management Solutions, recognized as a leader in the outsourcing industry, provides IT services as well as business processing services specifically for health and life insurance companies. The company offers a full range of services in the areas of disaster recovery and high availability. The fundamental business objective for the IT group is providing a stable environment for its customers.

"Maintaining peak system and application performance and availability is critical to our ability to provide the best quality service," says Andy Balazs, Vice President, Enterprise Technology Advancement, Infrastructure and Operations for Antares. "We depend on enterprise IT solutions partners, such as Mainstar, to ensure our members receive the best service at the best price."

Overview of Antares

Antares was formed in 1997 as a means for its parent company, Medical Mutual of Ohio, to diversify from pure health indemnity while capitalizing on decades of sizeable internal investments. Historically, Medical Mutual invested substantially in the development of its state-of-the-art information infrastructure. Antares assumed the sizeable IT resources of Medical Mutual and presents a complete package of knowledge and preparedness specific to the insurance and IT industry.

In just 10 years, Antares has grown from a handful of employees to more than 650 employees and increased its revenue six times over. Antares provides expertise for companies in diverse industries, including insurance, chemicals, ammunitions, and water heater manufacturing. Nationally recognized by several industry journals, Antares is accepted as an emerging leader in the outsourcing industry.

As an outsourcer, Antares must be agile and flexible to meet the diverse requirements of its customers. In addition, Antares must be able to meet demanding service level agreements (SLAs). Therefore, the company requires a robust, cost-effective, and easy-to-use data access toolset.

Maintaining the Health of a Data Environment

As Antares has grown, its data environment has grown as well



– both in size and complexity. Increased complexity in DASD and catalog sharing environments can create a higher risk of catalog problems. Because ICF catalogs are the key control structures that provide access to z/OS data, their integrity and 24x7 availability are vital. A disruption can mean several hours of outage, resulting in a loss of access to critical business applications.

Antares chose Mainstar's data integrity solutions to help manage the growth and performance of its systems and to ensure uninterrupted storage availability from its 5.5 terabyte DASD farm while controlling costs. Antares regularly uses the diagnostics in Catalog RecoveryPlus (CR+) and *FastAudit* to manage the environment proactively.

CR+ is an ICF catalog management solution that supports 24x7 data access and effective ICF catalog management. By running the diagnostic and repair facilities in CR+ on a regular basis, Antares ensures that its ICF catalogs are clean and error-free at all times. Antares can also ensure that all components of the ICF catalog environment are safely backed up and ready for forward recovery if a critical failure occurs.

Since CR+ is fast and easy to use, Antares can take advantage of the effective tools as often as needed – and can even reorg and repair BCS catalogs while they are open. The result: Antares can offer 24x7 data access while managing its data environment.

Antares uses *FastAudit* for fast, accurate, and flexible audits. Because *FastAudit* is more than 60 to 150 times faster than the DFSMSHsm AUDIT and Enhanced AUDIT commands, staff can run these audits frequently, even during heavy processing times, to identify and resolve corruption issues early, avoiding loss and inadvertent overlay of data. Then, employees view errors in the ISPF interface and fix any problems by choosing from automatically created FIX statements or by creating customized FIX statements.

Antares uses HSM Reporter/Manager and Storage Manager for environmental management and health checks, which are referred to as “preemptive review”. By implementing solid management techniques, Antares ensures the best performance and resiliency for its environment.

The Disaster Recovery Test

At the most recent disaster recovery (DR) exercise at Antares, CR+ was used to prepare the environment. This task, which had taken about 6.5 hours with the former ICF catalog management tool, was reduced to a matter of minutes,

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allowing for an additional 6 hours of application testing. Antares noted that its auditors sit through the DR exercises, and this most recent exercise was given a "highly effective" grade.

Antares uses Backup & Recovery Manager Suite: ASAP to identify critical files on a client-by-client basis. With this information, management can ensure that the data needed for a successful recovery is backed up. For ABARS-based clients (including Medical Mutual), Antares uses Backup & Recovery Manager Suite: ABARS Manager as the backup and recovery mechanism.

Partnering for Success

Founded in 1978, Mainstar has grown from a training and professional services provider to a proven authority in the z/OS and large system arena. Because of its history, Mainstar can provide uniquely effective knowledge transfer and expertise, helping companies such as Antares achieve better results with fewer resources. Mainstar solutions are designed to increase automation and flexibility, so installations can customize their data management to meet their business goals.

"Mainstar's tools justify themselves due to the ease with which they allow us to provide a stable processing environment for our clientele," said Balazs. "My staff truly views Mainstar as a partner who is committed to solving z/OS issues and helping us achieve serious results."

Conclusion

Providing a stable environment at a reasonable cost isn't easy. Antares not only achieves this, but also manages the challenges involved in growing to about six times its original revenue in just 10 years.

By taking advantage of Mainstar's solutions, Antares effectively reduces the costs of serious data management while supporting better data availability and resiliency.

For more information, visit Mainstar's web site, www.mainstar.com, or contact us at experts@mainstar.com to arrange a personal briefing.

Ken Rodger

Ken Rodger joined Mainstar Software Corporation as a Systems Engineer in 2001 with over twenty years of experience in mainframe performance tuning, capacity planning and storage management. Ken has worked in industries as diverse as oil, healthcare, publishing, human resources consulting, and manufacturing. He clearly understands the myriad challenges facing IT enterprises today, and works with users to provide comprehensive solutions.

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