

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

EMC Customer Support and Services help state agency protect and use information



ESSENTIALS

Challenge

- Keep critical SAN-based applications and data storage environment up and running

Solutions

- EMC Global Customer Support and Services
- EMC Celerra NS-120 unified storage
- EMC ApplicationXtender

Key benefits

- Onsite installation services help ensure smooth upgrades and transition to new technologies
- Online support forums make it easy to leverage expertise from EMC and other customers who use the same products
- Live Chat provides fast, convenient, and knowledgeable technical support
- Onsite services with four-hour or less response time help resolve problems fast

The mission of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) can be captured in one word: safety. The SCDC protects citizens by confining offenders in controlled facilities, and providing rehabilitative services that prepare inmates for re-integration into society. The department is equally committed to the safety of its workers and the inmates in its 29 multi-level security institutions across the state.

“As a correctional facility with an inmate population of 24,000, we face many of the same challenges as a small city,” says David Pfaehler, branch chief for Network Telecommunications at the SCDC.

SUPPORT MATTERS

Pfaehler is responsible for managing the telecommunications, a networked virtualized Microsoft® Windows® server environment, and an EMC storage area network (SAN) that are critical to the agency’s 24x7 operations.

To help him keep SCDC data safe—available, secure, and accessible—Pfaehler relies on a Premium Support contract from EMC Global Services.

“From my perspective—as the one who has to keep systems up and running—the quality of support from the vendor is 80 percent of the solution,” says Pfaehler. “Sure, we look for specific technical features, and price is always important, but when there’s an issue and you’re trying to recover from a problem, support is all that matters.”

MOVING TO A UNIFIED STORAGE TECHNOLOGY

The very first project Pfaehler took on when he arrived at the SCDC a few years ago was to move from a block storage SAN to a new unified network storage system.

“We were replacing an old EMC® CLARiiON® CX300 SAN with an EMC Celerra® NS-120,” says Pfaehler. “I didn’t have a lot of experience with EMC technology at the time and it was up to me to oversee the project.”

The department was upgrading to the EMC Celerra NS-120 with EMC CLARiiON CX4 networked storage due to a need for increased storage capacity, along with a unified automated tiered storage solution for its VMware® virtualization initiative.

“EMC Global Services worked with us through the whole process,” says Pfaehler. “They put together the package for the install, and everything went very smoothly. The technology was quite different from what we had, so there were a lot of questions. EMC supported us through that whole next year as we made the transition. They never minded all of our questions. They went above and beyond to help us learn, and to come up to speed on the new technology.”

“With EMC Customer Support and Services, I don’t wade through two or three layers of tech support to get to someone who understands the issue. That’s just dead time when I’m trying to resolve something. On the phone or online, with EMC, I know I’m going to get connected right away with someone who understands my technology and my problem.”

DAVID PFAEHLER,
BRANCH CHIEF FOR NETWORK TELECOMMUNICATIONS

ONLINE SUPPORT

The SCDC depends on the full range of EMC Customer Support Services—from EMC Online Support, to EMC Secure Remote Support (ESRS) services that proactively monitor and diagnose problems, to 24x7 telephone support, to onsite services with a response time of four hours or less.

The services Pfaehler uses most, however, are online—Support Forums and Live Chat services available through EMC Powerlink®; a customer web portal.

“I really don’t use other vendors’ support forums, because I’ve found them to be very general in nature,” says Pfaehler. “EMC Support Forums are broken down by product, so I can go to a particular forum and ask a question about a specific product. I know that people who have experience with that product are going to be answering my questions. I almost always get immediate responses to my questions.”

For most technical support issues, Pfaehler turns to the EMC Live Chat service.

“There is less impact on my time because I can multi-task and do other things,” explains Pfaehler. “The response is quick and the support has been excellent. If the conversation gets too deep and too technical, the Chat agent will open a support ticket with the information we shared and have someone call me back.”

“Even though the product I’m dealing with is a complex piece of technology, EMC seems to have the right people monitoring the forums and ready to chat,” Pfaehler adds. “I have found that I can ask very technical questions online and get the answer I need.”

While Live Chat is available for all severity levels, Pfaehler prefers to pick up the phone for more pressing problems.

“I want to hear somebody—and I want them to hear in my voice how severe the problem is for my organization,” says Pfaehler. “I also want to make sure that the problem has been communicated correctly. After that initial call though, I’ll use Live Chat to follow up or get a status update.”

Overall Pfaehler likes the fact that EMC provides customers with multiple vehicles to access support.

“I can access support using whatever method I prefer, but can always count on EMC regardless of the vehicle,” states Pfaehler. “I appreciate the extra investment that EMC makes in support.”

REDUCING PAPER

Some of the most important SCDC rehabilitation services are the educational and training courses it provides to improve the academic, vocational, and life skills inmates need to be successful after their return to society. Programs include adult basic education, GED

preparation, and training for various vocations. The instruction complies with the state South Carolina Department of Education regulations.

“We have the largest school district in the state,” says Pfaehler. “It’s also a very paper-intensive department.”

To help eliminate some of the paper files taking up valuable storage space—and to simplify the retention, searching, and sharing of information—the education department wanted to digitize its student records.

“As we built that project out, we looked at several different imaging vendors,” says Pfaehler. “We chose the EMC ApplicationXtender® document management solution because of its breadth of functionality as well as our existing relationship with EMC.”

The requirements for scanning, storing, and retrieving documents through an integrated, role-based access mechanism were all met in the SCDC’s choice of the EMC Application Xtender solution.

It was a large project, and because the team was already looking at other ways to leverage the solution by imaging other records and storing them on the SAN, they decided to upgrade the technology and add several more terabytes (TB) of disk space. This brought the total capacity of the SAN up to about 15 TB.

“Despite the need, there’s always a hesitation to upgrade,” says Pfaehler. “You put a technology in place and make it work. Everybody’s happy. You’re moving along just fine—and then you need to upgrade it. And with some vendors, upgrades can be fairly painful.”

In this case, everything went smoothly.

“We ordered another shelf of disk; EMC support engineers came on site; they installed everything; and it was a non-issue,” explains Pfaehler. “From an onsite support point view, EMC was pretty amazing.”

“It takes having been around the block a few times to appreciate good support,” concludes Pfaehler. “Our SAN is an extremely important core piece of technology that affects the entire organization. We need a company that would stand behind it and would be willing to go the extra mile. We couldn’t ask for anything better than what we’ve gotten from EMC. We’ve had a really good support experience.”

CONTACT US

To learn more about how EMC products, services, and solutions can help solve your business and IT challenges, contact your local sales representative, or visit us at www.EMC.com.

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