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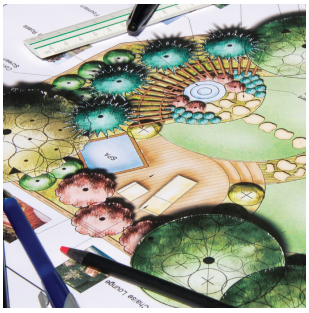




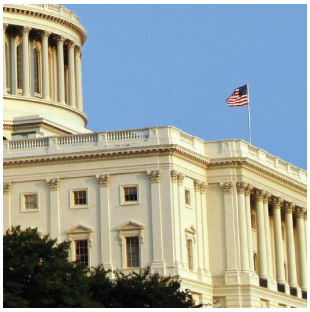


GlobalSCAPE WAFS delivers at PHR+A

For many companies, to say that the Internet has made the world smaller is nothing more than a cliché. At Patton Harris Rust & Associates (PHR+A), it has become a way of life. With over dozen branch offices spanning the Mid-Atlantic Region, this engineering and land development services company searched for a technology solution that could facilitate wide-scale project access and sharing throughout their geographically dispersed enterprise.

PHR+A has found a way to access and collaborate without the typical delays caused by bandwidth and latency. The solution is a 2 MB, downloadable application called *GlobalSCAPE WAFS.*

The Challenge.

PHR+A is a multi-disciplinary design firm offering extensive engineering and land development services to the private and public sector —not unlike what you may expect to find at mid-sized firms from all across the country. What is unique, however, is the approach that PHR+A has taken to optimize their human capital among thirteen dispersed locations. For example, to meet increasing project demands at their D.C.-area office, where the cost of living is nearly double that of the surrounding cities, PHR+A sought to maximize their resources in their Allentown, PA office, where labor costs and living costs are considerably lower.

In fact, with the exception of short-term projects like simple ALTA and boundary surveys, PHR+A primarily operates in collaboration by sharing their workload across geographic separations as they see fit to utilize their staff most efficiently. Project teams are rarely restricted to just one branch office or city. Their method relies heavily on the continual success of IT solutions that make such project access and collaboration possible. And nobody is more aware of this reliance than Mark Harris, one of their IT support staff.

In Search of a Solution...

“The engineers usually aren’t aware of IT until there’s a problem,” Mark said with a chuckle. Mark has been evaluating various methods to support the company’s ambitious multi-location strategy for years. “We looked at GlobalSCAPE several years ago, but it almost looked too simple,” Mark explained.

Instead, Mark first implemented a Distributed File System (DFS) in Windows® 2000. With projects averaging 30-40 GB of data each, the DFS approach was unable to keep up. “With Windows 2000, DFS uses the CIFS protocol, not byte-level differencing, so a 50 MB file has to transmit 50 MB of data to synchronize. Whole projects could take two or three weeks to transfer,” Mark explained. In an effort to improve transfer speeds, Mark also briefly examined a WAN-acceleration appliance solution, but discovered that it, too, would require large amounts of cache and would increase technology costs significantly in order to operate. Further, users would still have wait times to access key project and work files.

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Today, most of PHR+A’s collaboration is facilitated by simple FTP transfers combined with a thick standards document to manually maintain file coherence. There is no file locking, so deviation from policy can mean costly re-work. But, what concerns Mark most is the duplication of data that pollutes his storage space and back-ups. He explained, “Every local server has a ‘download’ folder and an ‘upload’ folder. Within those folders we find multiple versions of each file. So, we are doubling, and often quadrupling the amount of storage required for a single drawing or project file.” Although the overall cost of storage is decreasing in today’s market, the IT costs of managing and backing-up excess data can be high.

For PHR+A, where project collaboration is more than a luxury, but rather a critical business function, there is little opportunity to test new solutions in a working environment. But in January 2007, Mark got a chance to try something new. PHR+A acquired a small company in Newport News, VA, where they would be collaborating almost exclusively with the existing Virginia Beach location. Nearly three years after Mark first reviewed GlobalSCAPE as a possible solution, he decided to use this opportunity to implement it. Mark asked management if he could pilot the software in Newport News, and permission was granted.

The Solution.

“I couldn’t believe how easy GlobalSCAPE WAFS was to install,” Mark said, “A server component, a client component, and it’s up and running.” In no time at all, the installation and configuration was complete and the servers were synchronizing. Also, there was virtually zero footprint of the program itself. “I’m accustomed to software programs like Symantec and SQL that demand significant server resources,” Mark explained, “but GlobalSCAPE is completely different.” The ability for PHR+A to use pre-existing server infrastructure added significantly to the cost justification of the project.

It didn’t take long before the Virginia Beach and Newport News offices were accessing and collaborating, with over 20 active projects and 30 GB of data being shared seamlessly between the two offices. Users were accessing project files at near LAN speed across the branch offices. Individual files range from a few megabytes, to over 30 MB with the inclusion of image overlays or where large survey bases are required. Nonetheless, “I know it’s working well,” Mark explained, “because the engineers don’t even notice anything happening. It’s completely transparent.” Unlike the other solutions, users experience no delays due to latency, network chatter, or traffic spikes associated with user-based work patterns.

This sort of transparency that GlobalSCAPE provides is indeed a luxury for project teams at PHR+A. With the FTP system that other branch offices have relied on, a member of the project team would have to prep files for transfer manually, zip the folders, and then upload the project, while someone on the other end waited anxiously for the files to arrive. This took place at least twice a week, wasting several hours of billable time. WAFS, however, mirrors these same project files instantly at the byte level, so each branch office server has the guaranteed latest version of files, and users at each branch have real-time access to the files.

> **“We always know our data is current.”**

Transfer speeds aside, Mark emphasized that “two or three hours lost each week to upload times is nothing compared to the rework that we avoid.” GlobalSCAPE WAFS enables real-time file locking, file coherency, and WAN outage support, as well. “We always know our data is current,” Mark stated confidently. “If work was done on an old version and had to be redone, that could cost thousands of dollars, especially if the survey crew has to revisit a site.” Whatever cost advantages PHR+A may have gained through their geographically dispersed workforce could quickly be lost if an IT failure caused rework to occur. GlobalSCAPE eliminates this risk by ensuring file coherence across all branch offices.

Looking Ahead.

Just ten months after the pilot first began in Newport News, Mark was already charting his plans to implement GlobalSCAPE WAFS throughout the company in the following year. For a firm that relies so heavily on file sharing technology, such a major shift is not decided upon easily. According to Mark, GlobalSCAPE WAFS has certainly passed the test and proved itself worthy at PHR+A.

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