

## MultiChoice locks down data protection for on-prem and cloud workloads

Africa's leading entertainment company, MultiChoice, has deployed a powerful data protection solution, enabling the organisation to protect twice as many systems as it could previously, while using less infrastructure.

In addition, the company has seen a significant improvement in backup success over the previous legacy system, with day-to-day management of the data protection environment taking the MultiChoice team approximately a quarter of the time previously spent.

### A challenging environment

The group required uninterrupted availability for several key business systems, which includes one that manages content and ensures programmes flow to customers without interruption, and another that underlies corporate billing.

MultiChoice's Storage and Data Protection Platforms group is responsible for maintaining the availability of these applications and data. However, its then-legacy data protection solution had seen persistent challenges from the start.

"We were constantly rebooting all the backup servers," explains Pfarelo Masithulela, Senior Manager, Storage and Data Protection Platforms, at the MultiChoice Group. "On some occasions, we would find that the deduplication database had gone into a maintenance and rebuild mode, which could take many hours. We could not send

data when it was in maintenance mode and would then have to shift all of our systems to back up to a different location."

Even when backups were completed successfully, they often took longer than the designated backup window, creating concern for potential cyberattacks – in particular ransomware – on core applications and databases.

"And as our exposures mounted, our hardware costs continued to escalate," says Masithulela. "The product was initially less expensive than competitors, but we learned the hard way that it needed more hardware to function properly, and these requirements kept growing."

With the licence renewal for the legacy solution approaching, MultiChoice decided to relook at its data protection strategy, with Masithulela and his team launching an open request for proposals (RFP). The organisation appointed hybrid ICT systems integrator and managed services provider, Datacentrix, to help with solution selection, architecture design, and implementation.

"MultiChoice engaged Datacentrix to solve our myriad data protection problems," states Masithulela. "We needed a knowledgeable service provider that understood how to overcome our specific pain points, and, after comparing the certifications and skillsets that different providers had to offer, were most impressed by Datacentrix."



## Building a world-class platform

With the assistance of Datacentrix, MultiChoice conducted a thorough needs assessment and due diligence process to select a new data protection vendor, deciding on a consolidated approach for backing up data across its hybrid environment.

Datacentrix' 100 percent success rate for data restores across an extensive testing regime gave MultiChoice management confidence that they would be able to recover fully in the event of a ransomware attack, comments Masithulela.

“Datacentrix worked hand-in-hand with Veritas, the enterprise data protection specialist, to design and build a world-class backup platform for our workloads, both on-prem and in the cloud,” he adds.

MultiChoice and Datacentrix collaborated for more than a year on its needs assessment and due diligence processes. “We outlined our pain points, then evaluated and selected a solution with the help of Datacentrix, although we took our decisions internally,” Masithulela says.

Aside from mitigating a potential ransomware risk, the project team identified a few additional key requirements, including ease of management, which were all met by the Veritas solutions.

MultiChoice wanted to streamline data protection across both on-premises and cloud-based systems. Most of its databases will remain on-premises in the short term, but the organisation is planning to increase its intake of the cloud. Masithulela explains: “We have a number of cloud-ready applications that we're migrating to Microsoft Azure and AWS, deciding between the two based on the application.

“So, as we evaluated prospective backup solutions, we were looking for a system that would integrate cloud and on-prem backups in a single console, with central management across the enterprise,” he adds. “This was another area where the proposed Veritas solution stood out.”

## Efficiency-focused data protection architecture

Datacentrix walked the MultiChoice team through several infrastructure design options, with the teams working closely together to plan and deploy the Veritas data protection solution. Now, on-premises systems and databases back up to Veritas appliances in the corporate datacentre. Based on container technology, the appliances provide multi-tenant capabilities.



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“Having a converged platform enables media servers and master servers to coexist on the same hardware. That has really reduced the number of servers and detached storage that our data protection environment requires. Our legacy solution needed racks and racks of servers and block storage, while the entire Veritas solution takes less than one rack.”

Meanwhile, Datacentrix implemented virtual machines (VMs) in the cloud to manage MultiChoice's backups in both AWS and Azure. For long-term retention and disaster recovery (DR), Datacentrix configured both the cloud-based VMs and the appliances to replicate backups to an appliance in the datacentre, which then replicates to another appliance in the company's DR site.

MultiChoice is now also able to monitor backup performance and storage utilisation. Daily notifications provide details on backup failures and successes, while a dashboard offers an overview of MultiChoice's entire data protection environment and allows Datacentrix to move resources around to gain better efficiencies. “From a single pane of glass, I can see what our success rates are and where any problem areas lie,” Masithulela says.

The project timeline was tight as the legacy software's licence renewal approached. Together, Datacentrix and Veritas implemented the replacement data protection infrastructure within a month. “Both Datacentrix and Veritas provided excellent service,” Masithulela says. “We had joint project meetings on a weekly basis, sometimes



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even daily. The Datacentrix engineers really knew what they were doing, and they didn't hesitate to bring in further expertise from overseas when necessary."

After deployment, Datacentrix then trained MultiChoice database administrators (DBAs). "Datacentrix showed our team how to run backups and how to restore," Masithulela says. "The company also helped our DBAs understand expectations. This training ensured that everyone who would be involved in data protection was comfortable with the solution."

As part of its extensive testing process, Datacentrix helped the MultiChoice management team to become more comfortable with the transition, restoring all of the company's large databases. "The restores were successful, and everyone was happy, including our audit team," Masithulela says. "I know that we can restore any systems or data across our data protection landscape."

This meets the key requirement of the solution: "If we face a ransomware attack, our new environment will protect our critical data. We're confident that we can recover from our backups if necessary."

Backups are completing much faster, due partly to the stability and deduplication abilities of the Veritas solution, which significantly reduce the volume of backup data that MultiChoice writes and replicates. As a result, the company was able

to more than double the number of systems it backs up, without enlarging the backup window.

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Costs are lower and more transparent because MultiChoice is working with a single vendor for both software and hardware. Management of the data protection environment is streamlined, as well. "With our legacy solution, we managed backup and retention policies on the storage layer, which was difficult," Masithulela says. "By contrast, managing policies is straightforward with the Veritas solution, which has reduced the amount of time spent managing data protection each day."

MultiChoice achieved all these benefits thanks to the expertise of the Datacentrix team. "We leveraged Datacentrix' skills and understanding of the Veritas products," Masithulela concludes. "They worked hand-in-hand with Veritas to make sure that we ended up with a solution that we trust, and that is stable and resilient.

"We can say with confidence that Datacentrix and Veritas built a world-class backup platform for our workloads, both on-prem and in the cloud."