



Modernizing to the hybrid cloud model: why Crain Communications chose Nasuni

Modernizing infrastructure at a business media giant with cloud file services

Crain is one of the largest privately-owned business media companies in the world. Through its 23 leading media brands, including AdAge, Crain's, and Autoweek, the company delivers news to more than 6 million global business leaders. Crain's journalists, industry experts, and business insiders are committed to producing stories, communities, and platforms that power the success of their audiences. The company is a multi-platform media conglomerate that includes print publications, websites, digital newsletters, direct mail, mobile apps, research papers, and more.

Generating that much content translates into steady, significant growth of files and unstructured data. Several years ago, the forward-thinking company transitioned to a new editorial system across all its brands and used the opportunity to implement its servers in Amazon Web Services (AWS).



Industry

Media and publishing

Global file system

Nasuni

Object storage

AWS simple storage service (S3)

Use cases

NAS consolidation; cloud backup; cloud disaster recovery; M&A integration; multi-site file collaboration

Benefits

Shutting down aging file and print servers at 15 locations; instant file recovery; simpler management; shifting from CAPEX to flexible, cost-effective OPEX

The program was a success, but Crain had another, even larger problem to deal with. “All of our file and print servers across the country were aging and constantly running out of space,” explains Kristy Caldwell, Director, IT Operations at Crain. “They couldn’t really be updated, and we were spending a lot of money and time maintain them. We needed a cloud solution.”



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Searching for a central cloud file share

At first, Crain’s IT group experimented with putting its files directly in the cloud. The firm has hefty Internet pipes at several of its sites, so they figured this approach might work with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Adobe Creative files. Unfortunately, bandwidth wasn’t enough to get those files to and from the cloud efficiently. “It was very chatty and slow,” Caldwell recalls. “We have some file sharing going on between cities and that was really slow. So that was something we were looking to conquer.”

The team at AWS suggested a few alternatives. Crain conducted a rigorous analysis and defined exactly what it wanted in a cloud solution, including: server infrastructure at our satellite offices,” Steven says. “Nasuni has played a key part in our larger strategic shift to becoming a more agile, cloud-first organization.”

- One central file share extending to all offices
- No more on-site tape backups
- Faster restores and recoveries
- Fast performance for end users
- Unlimited, cost-effective storage
- Reduced storage and data protection costs

“What we were hoping to accomplish was not only to have a cloud solution where we could have one central file share but also to eliminate the need to do on-site tape backups which are expensive to store offsite,” Caldwell explains. There was one other critical metric: “We had to ensure the performance was up to our standards and show our stakeholders what they were going to spend money on.”

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The file services platform built for the cloud

After testing and evaluating its options, Crain chose the Nasuni platform. Nasuni combines the power of the cloud with local edge performance, providing a suite of file services at half the cost of traditional NAS environments. Nasuni allows companies to consolidate their NAS footprint by moving infrastructure silos to the cloud, eliminate traditional backups with continuous versioning, and share files globally. Powered by the world's only global file system, UniFS®, Nasuni gives companies:

- Infinite on-demand scale
- Edge appliances that deliver local NAS performance
- Centralized management for optimal efficiency
- Cloud orchestration services for a scalable multi-site file sharing
- Connectors to leverage any 3rd party cloud services

UniFS is the first file system designed to reside and scale natively within public or private cloud object storage, and it has no limits on file, directory, snapshot, or volume size. An IT administrator creates a cloud storage volume, UniFS is instantiated within it, and subsets of the file system are cached on each virtual or physical Nasuni Edge Appliance. As a result, users at any location can browse the global file system and read and write active files at local LAN speeds.

This unique cloud-native file system not only maintains familiarity and performance for end users. It also eradicates the need for full-sized file servers or NAS arrays at all locations and reduces traditional file storage footprint by up to 80%.

Results: backed by the cloud, powered by Nasuni

Cutting costs through infrastructure consolidation

By switching to Nasuni, Crain was immediately able to eliminate the pain and complexity of traditional infrastructure – not to mention the cost. Crain no longer has to worry about updating its aging and capacity-constrained print and file servers. Crain calculated how much it was going to cost for us to maintain its old servers in terms of maintenance and backup and management, and modernizing with Nasuni cost significantly less than maintaining the status quo. Another added benefit, according to Caldwell: “All that infrastructure is going away by the end of the year.”

Replacing capacity planning with infinite scale

One of the challenges of the growth in the size and volume of files has been projecting storage needs at the local level, and provisioning capacity. The IT group at Crain was constantly dealing with the file growth challenge at its 23 global locations. With Nasuni, the problem of scale is eliminated. “Our customers are very happy,” says Crane Network Administrator David Sims. “They enjoy the high availability and they like that we can provide better space and more space.”

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Accelerating file sharing and collaboration

Switching to a cloud-based model has also alleviated Crain's file sharing pains. One of the primary benefits of moving the file system to the cloud with Nasuni is the ability to unlock collaboration between offices. Nasuni's cloud-based file synchronization and locking services allow users or teams distributed across different regions, countries, or continents to collaborate seamlessly on shared files without version conflicts. The Nasuni approach combines local performance with cloud scale, and it has been designed and tested to work with files of any size or complexity. Crain's editorial and content production teams can easily share and collaborate on Office documents, Adobe files, and more.

Eliminating backup with instant file recovery

Nasuni Continuous File Versioning® eliminates the need for traditional backup, reduces ransomware impact to almost zero, and allows for controllable RTO's and RPO's. With WORM file writing, an unlimited version history of every file is maintained in the cloud with georedundant protection. For companies like Crain, that means no more backups and tapes – and no more of the associated costs and management hassles.

It also gives each office instant Disaster Recovery and powerful Business Continuity without separate infrastructure. Plus it requires little or no oversight, which gives IT more time to focus on strategic, high-value work instead of backup maintenance.



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Simplifying and cleaning up folders and permissions

Crain used its transition to Nasuni to initiate a larger project focused on cleaning up its folder structures, permissions, and more. This is not uncommon with Nasuni clients, as the chance to consolidate dozens or even hundreds of sites into a single file system presents a unique opportunity for IT to tighten its control over infrastructure.

"We took this opportunity to flatten out our whole structure and simplify it by brand and department and not have folders all over the place," Caldwell explains. "So we took a lot of things that were problems, such as complicated folder structures, and worked with our customers to decide what needed to go to the new system. It was a lot of work, but we took our time to do the right thing."

Minimizing disruption to the end user

Although Nasuni implements massive change, consolidating infrastructure at anywhere from dozens to hundreds of sites in the cloud, the impact on end users is minimal. Nasuni was designed from the start to leverage the power of the cloud while maintaining the performance and familiarity of local NAS. This was a key requirement for Crain, and they surveyed their end users to ensure the cutover was painless.

“After each brand was rolled out we did follow up with the customers and get their feedback, and they all said overwhelmingly how easy it was,” Caldwell recalls. “They came in and got a new drive letter and that was it. They thought it was very smooth in terms of rollout.”

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Simplifying file infrastructure management for IT

Nasuni was designed to simplify global storage and data protection infrastructure for large enterprises, but it's also tuned to reduce unnecessary and time-consuming storage and backup administration work. The Nasuni Management Console allows IT to remotely provision, monitor, control, and report on the global file estate.

“From a managing standpoint it's very simple, very easy,” says Sims. “Nasuni has definitely simplified our lives. It has really paid off.”

Faster, easier onboarding of newly acquired brands

The media and publishing industry is dominated by change and consolidation. Crain recently purchased another brand, and the IT group plans to deploy a Nasuni Edge Appliance onsite to onboard the new location. This support for M&A integration is one of the advantages of switching to a file services platform built for the cloud. IT doesn't have to provision additional file storage and data protection infrastructure onsite at new locations. Simply deploying an appliance will bring that location into the global file system and empower it with all the advantages of the complete Nasuni file services platform.

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What's next for Crain and Nasuni

Initially, Crain deployed Nasuni at seven sites, but the firm soon expanded to fifteen locations. The first phase of this file infrastructure project was to implement Nasuni and shut down all its old file and print servers. Now the IT team is looking to consolidate storage in unconventional places, such as external drives or cloud solutions that locations have adopted independently. "We know that there's a lot of other storage going on whether it's in external drives or a cloud solution," Caldwell explains. "We'd like to get that into our final solution as well to make sure it's protected and shareable and in the right place."

Once that phase is complete, the IT group will look to start moving the firm's video content to the Nasuni file system. "All of this will result in one central storage place for all of our data," Caldwell says, "and that's Nasuni."

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Nasuni is a fluid data platform for enterprises facing an explosion of unstructured data in an AI world, eliminating the choice between expensive tinkering or an overwhelming transformation of your entire data infrastructure.

The Nasuni File Data Platform delivers effortless scale in hybrid cloud environments, enables control at the network edge, and meets the modern enterprise expectation for protected, insight- and AI-ready data. It simplifies file data management while increasing access and performance.

Consolidate data, cut costs, and empower users — all while transforming your data from obstacle into opportunity.