

Case Study

Global Holding Company APi Group Advances Digital and Cloud Initiatives & Improves File Storage, Management and Protection with Nasuni



APi Group is a Minnesota-based holding company that consists of four major business sectors, 40 separate companies and 5,000 employees spread across 200 locations. A corporate initiative to embrace the cloud and reduce IT infrastructure expenditures spurred IT to look for alternative storage and data protection solutions. The combination of Nasuni enterprise file services and Microsoft Azure is providing improved global file sharing, limitless storage scalability, fast DR, enhanced recovery points and times, and a shift away from capital-intensive IT investments to a cloud-scale service model.

Founded in 1920, Minneapolis, Minnesota-based APi Group has grown rapidly through acquisitions. Today, APi consists of 40 different companies operating within four major business sectors, including life safety products, specialty construction, infrastructure, and gas and oil pipelines. The IT group serves more than 5,000 employees spread across 200 offices in the U.S., Canada and Great Britain. In recent years, the company's file

File Services: Nasuni
Cloud: Microsoft Azure
Total Capacity: 140 TB
Sites: 200
Users: 5,000
Key Applications:
Office 365, CAD, GIS

storage, access and protection solutions had begun to negatively impact daily operations as well as the company's acquisition strategy, which required integrating new offices into the larger corporate infrastructure.

End users in different locations struggled to share design files and project management documents, which limited their ability to collaborate. Data protection was no better. When employees accidentally lost or deleted files, the team was forced to spend far too much time attempting to remotely recover them. Some of APi Group's offices are in tornado-prone regions, yet IT did not have an effective and scalable DR strategy.

From a strategic standpoint, the capital-intensive NAS infrastructure clashed with the new corporate mandate to implement a more cost-effective and elastic OPEX model that would enable the company to spin up and spin down resources on-demand.

Accelerating a Shift to Cloud

In addition to this move toward OPEX, the CFO and CIO at APi Group were advancing a company-wide cloud-first initiative. "One of the goals we set was to migrate to the cloud as quickly as we could, but we were seeing that as years away," says Brian Erickson, IT Implementation and Acquisition Manager at APi Group. "Then Nasuni entered the picture and it was instant cloud infrastructure. We were able to accelerate our timeline."

APi Group had already embraced Office 365 and was backing up data to Microsoft Azure. Yet IT recognized they were not leveraging all of Azure's potential. They began evaluating alternative file storage and data protection solutions. Although competitive solutions promised some similar features, Nasuni was the only platform that offered the scalability to support the anticipated growth of unstructured data, the high performance access for end users in remote locations, and the advanced file protection.

"Nasuni is a very reliable and robust platform. It's one thing I don't need to worry about on evenings or weekends anymore. If you have collaborative needs or are looking to move to the cloud, I can't think of a better product than Nasuni."

Brian Erickson, IT Implementation & Acquisition Manager

Cloud-Scale Enterprise File Services with Nasuni and Azure

In Nasuni, APi Group saw a platform that could transform file sharing and collaboration, backup and recovery, DR, and IT operations with one unified solution, while also easing the transition to the cloud. Today, Nasuni, backed by Azure object storage, is providing file services for 140 TB of unstructured data, and the transition was smooth and efficient. End users did not even notice when IT made the cutover from APi Group's legacy NAS infrastructure to the new cloud-scale services.

Converting Storage CAPEX to OPEX

At the heart of the Nasuni platform is its global file system, UniFS®, which stores all files and metadata in Azure. Small Nasuni edge appliances are then deployed on-premises to provide cached, local access to frequently used files. As a result, APi no longer needs to continually purchase large NAS arrays to keep pace with file growth. “Nasuni has enabled us to maintain an operational model rather than forcing us to go out every year and invest more of our capital budget in storage,” explains Skip Hansen, VP of IT Operations at APi Group.

Empowering Collaborative Design Teams

Nasuni caches frequently accessed files locally to provide fast access for end users. However, all file changes are continuously pushed to the cloud where the “gold master” copies reside. All other edge appliances mounting the same volume then locally copy down the gold master from the cloud object store. This “cloud-first” architecture enables true global file sharing. For example, when APi offices in California and Florida were working for the same client, IT set up a collaborative share. “I was able to get them up and running within five minutes and they both had access to the same set of files,” comments Erickson.

Accelerating Access at Remote Offices

In the past, designers at remote offices and project sites had to pull in CAD drawings and other large files through low-bandwidth connections. Delays were common. Nasuni’s stateless edge appliances extend fast access to all users, even those in remote offices, without the need for costly replication, WAN acceleration, or remote access solutions. “With Nasuni edge appliances acting as the file server on site and only having to be just big enough to store the active files, our designers are getting their files at local LAN speed,” says Calvin Olson, IT Manager at APi Group. “We’ve been able to apply the cost savings of not having large NAS arrays in remote offices to the purchase of other needed IT resources.”

Improving Enterprise IT Management & Control

Instead of managing 200 individual storage silos, IT now oversees file storage, access and protection through the Nasuni Management Console. Being able to administer the company’s enterprise-wide file infrastructure through a single-pane-of-glass instead of 5 or even 7 different point solutions has freed up time for more strategic IT projects.

Easing the Integration of New Acquisitions

Now, when APi Group buys a new company, IT merely has to deploy Nasuni edge appliances at the new offices and establish permissions and shares. The new locations join the global file share in minutes. Nasuni and Azure are helping IT accelerate the company’s merger and acquisition strategy, which is helping APi Group achieve its broader business goals.

Trading Backup for Unequaled RPOs and RTOs

Nasuni Continuous Versioning is now used for file backup and recovery at APi Group. This built-in data protection feature of the Nasuni platform sends all file changes to the cloud, creating an immutable version history of every file. In the event of data loss incidents, local outages, Ransomware, or even regional disasters, IT can restore access to any previous version of the file or to entire directories. Recovery points are much more recent, recovery times are reduced from days to minutes, and downtime is less of an issue. “With Nasuni, we’re able to easily roll back files to the point right before Cryptolocker hit us,” adds Olson. “It’s less effort for us in IT, and less productivity loss for our users.”

Enabling Digital Transformation, One File at a Time

Skip Hansen was brought on specifically to lead APi Group’s digital transformation. He sees Nasuni as a key strategic partner in this effort. With Nasuni and Azure, the company can spin up storage resources on-demand, keep pace with business needs, and greatly reduce costs. “Nasuni has enabled us to move from a rigid, capital-intensive hardware cycle to an as-a-service, pay-as-we-grow model,” says Hansen. “That agility has helped us in all aspects of our business, from file collaboration in remote offices to digesting new acquisitions to better protecting our critical project assets from disasters. We’re delighted with the Nasuni and Microsoft partnership and the benefits we’re seeing from the joint solution.”