

The Farmers Fire Insurance Company

Insuring an insurance company against disaster



Client Success Story

Insurance Industry

Business Risk Services
Dynamic Infrastructure
Data Management / Analytics

essextec
GETTING IT DONE TOGETHER

Providing peace of mind through partnership

OVERVIEW

The Farmers Fire Insurance Company



Based in York, Pennsylvania, The Farmers Fire Insurance Company has been helping homeowners, renters, and businesses protect themselves and their property for 160 years. They are “Pioneers in Protection” – having been there for their customers through the Civil War, the Great Depression, and two world wars. They are proud of their tradition of strength and dependability and their ability to provide their customers with peace of mind.

But, there came a time when the company found itself exposed and unprotected from disaster. It was time to get some insurance of its own.

CHALLENGE

Insuring an insurance company against disaster



“Farmers Fire had a mix of old servers from several different manufacturers,” says Craig Shaknis, a Vice President and Senior Account Executive at Essexotec. “They didn’t have any virtualization set up. Each server was dedicated to a specific application and the environment was becoming increasingly hard to manage.”

Farmers Fire had a collage of old servers and computer architecture that left it nearly unmanageable – and vulnerable.

“Our backup system and recovery strategy needed a fresh look,” says John Sweigart, Assistant Vice President and Director of IT at Farmers Fire. “Our disaster recovery test results weren’t as reassuring as we’d liked.”

In 2012, the company was not completely satisfied with their disaster recovery test routine at the IBM Business Continuity and Resiliency Services Site in Sterling Forest, NY.

“The client could recover their IBM i Series side, but they couldn’t recover their Windows side of the equation,” states Craig. “This meant no disaster recovery whatsoever, because the two sides depend on each other.”

And, this was something Farmers Fire could not afford to risk. “We serve a substantial workforce of insurance agents and they depend on our system to make quotes and enter claims,” comments John.

Farmers Fire is in the business of meeting urgent needs every day for customers recovering from misfortune.

In short, the insurance company needed some protection of its own.



“I can tell you we all sleep better because we know our system, our agents, and our customers are all protected, thanks to Essexotec.”

- John Sweigart, Vice President and Director of IT - The Farmers Fire

SOLUTION

They knew where to turn



Essextec and Farmers Fire have a long standing business relationship, but this was the first time their DR strategy was examined comprehensively. Farmers Fire asked Essextec to evaluate where they could modernize and to show them how to be better prepared for the unexpected.

“The conversation around these solutions started because of DR — and about looking at new approaches,” explains Craig. “Farmers Fire runs an IBM Power Systems solution that has a very good backup plan. They wanted to put their servers under that backup system. But, we found a better solution.”

The Essextec team of Jon Ashare, Systems Consultant; Brian Kuebler, Solutions Architect; and John Gulak, Systems Consultant got right to work on a fresh idea.

The team was brought in to survey Farmers Fires’ infrastructure to see what the servers’ workloads were and what capacity it would require.

They studied the situation and came up with a comprehensive plan to modernize their IT infrastructure, protect their data, preserve their uptime, and improve customer satisfaction.

“Our teams worked with the IT group from Farmers Fire to understand their unique requirements such as their retention periods, so the backup strategy we rolled out would fit them just right,” says Craig.

Essextec proposed a solution that would update Farmers Fire’s technology with IBM servers, a small SAN, going from a standalone environment to a virtual environment, and a backup solution they could count on.

“We approached Farmers Fire with a total solution to upgrade their aging infrastructure with industry leading technology. Specifically, IBM x Series 3650 servers, IBM DS3524 storage, VMware virtualization, and CommVault Simpana software,” says Craig.

Putting the solution to work

The team moved Farmers Fire to a two-server virtualization solution and a backup system that protects the insurance company from just about anything short of a direct asteroid hit.

“Within the VMware solution, we introduced two IBM x3650 servers and we spread the workload across them. The workload doesn’t exceed 50% across the servers, so if they have a planned or unplanned outage, they can migrate over to the other server, which gives them a local high availability network,” explains Craig.

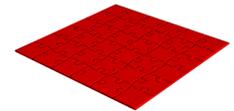
The Essextec team led and executed the entire implementation — which also meant they have first hand knowledge of the environment if questions or issues arise in the future.

“We went on-site, stacked the equipment, loaded the software, managed the migration from the old, physical island to the virtual environment and conducted staff training on the VMware solution — enabling Farmers Fire to hit the ground running when we flipped the switch,” states Craig.

“Having the same core team of experts study the situation, plan, and implement the strategy, can make all the difference,” says John. “The same people who initially looked at our current state and proposed a new solution — stayed with us through the entire rollout. We never had to worry. The Essextec team knew exactly what they were doing.”

RESULTS

A reassured insurer



The Essextec solution has proven to be successful by many measures, but one of the most important is the confidence that comes from having a capable partner who understands your infrastructure — and stays by your side. The quick call or email. The answered questions. The tweaking and monitoring that Farmers Fire needed to make sure things remain up and running.

“After implementation, we continued monitoring and addressing any concerns that came up and we stayed available to answer any questions they might have had,” says Craig. “So, when there were bumps along the way, we were right there to see them through. It’s reassuring to our clients to know that we have the subject matter experts on staff to address every detail.”

Today, Farmers Fire has an IT environment that’s easier to manage and maintain and is insured for continuity of business.

continued on back

RESULTS cont.

“Farmers Fire now has a standardized Windows environment that is straightforward to manage and maintain,” states Craig. “There’s also room to grow for future workloads and applications that can easily be added through VMware and the new hardware infrastructure.”

I can tell you we all sleep better,” John says. “Because we know our system, our agents, and our customers are all protected, thanks to Essextec.”

“They’re getting reliable backups that can be recovered at their IBM disaster recovery site,” Craig says. “And through VMware VMotion, they have local high availability in the event of a server failure.”

Precisely the peace of mind an insurance company needs.

OUR CUSTOMERS' SUCCESS IS OUR SUCCESS

Businesses of all sizes and across all industries are discovering the growing importance of connecting IT strategies and solutions with overall business goals and opportunities. It's critical that the technology environment be dynamic, scalable, highly available, and secure. Businesses must also ensure the integrity of their data, manage compliance mandates, and continually do more with less.

Our decades of experience, along with our broad portfolio of technology solutions and services, give you the confidence you need to thrive amid today's business demands. With technology constantly evolving, our consultants and certified technical experts stay on top of the latest advances to make sure you can remain competitive. We work with the most respected minds in the technology industry to offer a complete portfolio of solutions. We can help you navigate the ever-increasing demands of your business and the technology that powers it — whether your current challenge is:

- > Defining and implementing a disaster recovery strategy
- > Managing and protecting your mobile consumers and workforce
- > Harnessing your data for sharper, more relevant insights
- > Managing governance and regulatory compliance mandates
- > Mitigating company-wide risk
- > Virtualizing and reducing cost

No matter what your current technology challenge, we can help.

Learn more about our solutions and how we are helping businesses such as Farmers Fire.

Visit essextec.com or call our main office at 1-888-519-1518 to learn more or to schedule a consultation.

