

Birmingham Hippodrome Gives SIOS Protection Suite Two Thumbs Up

SIOS Clustering Software Ensures 24/7 Availability of Online Ticketing System



The theatre with the highest regular annual attendance in the United Kingdom uses SIOS Protection Suite software to safeguard its online ticketing system, keeping it available 24/7 even in the event of software bugs, hardware failure or unanticipated outages. By moving off a hosted server and onto its own in-house networking infrastructure, the theatre has also freed itself to develop a new marketing strategy based around its website and database of customers.

The Environment

Before choosing SIOS Protection Suite, Birmingham Hippodrome shared a hosted system from Birmingham Arts IT (BAIT) with 14 charitable trusts and art venues across the city of Birmingham. BAIT provided Birmingham Hippodrome with its ticketing system and all back office functions. Because the server was shared, improvements and modifications had to be approved by all BAIT organisations.

Birmingham Hippodrome could not tailor the server to suit its own marketing needs; nor deploy a disaster recovery strategy unless all other organisations sharing the server agreed to the potentially expensive upgrade.

Birmingham Hippodrome can sell £80,000 - £85,000 of tickets in a single day, mostly via the Internet. According to Director of Operations Mike Bradford, the theatre's online ticketing is "very much a 24/7 system," with the only low period of sales occurring around two o'clock in the morning. A single day of server downtime for the Birmingham Hippodrome costs them approximately £20,000.

In two years with BAIT, the theatre experienced two major outages, each with downtime of more than one day. Bradford said it was not these occasional outages, but rather "the fact that there was always the possibility of something worse happening and the worry that caused made us bring IT in-house."

The Challenge

Birmingham Hippodrome's detailed specification called for a new network infrastructure that would deliver high availability (HA) and disaster recovery (DR), with no single point of failure. The new infrastructure would need to be flexible and resilient enough to enable them to tailor the

system to improve marketing around its website and customer database. The infrastructure would need to run all back office tasks, including a new e-mail system and the theatre's own ticket booking, de-booking and credit card service. The system would need to support Birmingham Hippodrome's Partner Organisations: Birmingham Royal Ballet and DanceXchange. Birmingham Hippodrome contracted Linux specialist reseller eSpida, an IT infrastructure consultancy. eSpida was supported by SIOS UK Solution Centre Open Minds.

The Solution

To deliver full HA/DR protection, eSpida built two server rooms, each replicating to the other, so that if one server failed, the ticket operations would continue on the other server. They also used two leased lines and two service providers at two points in the city with two separate main supplies. They also virtualised their network infrastructure to simplify server "housekeeping."

They use SIOS Protection Suite for Linux to ensure continuous availability of applications and the online ticketing system. The suite includes SIOS LifeKeeper, which detects issues on the primary server, and if necessary, orchestrates failover of the ticket system operation to the secondary server. This capability ensures that both Birmingham Hippodrome staff and customers shopping for tickets online are unaffected by system failures or maintenance. LifeKeeper monitors system and application health, maintains client connectivity and provides uninterrupted data access, giving Birmingham Hippodrome the reliable, HA system they need.

Benefits

Nick Roberts, a technical sales consultant for eSpida, said: "One of the reasons we use SIOS Protection Suite is because the history and heritage of the product goes back decades, really. It's good to use something that is tried and tested like SIOS Protection Suite. Our investment is safe with a product like that because we know it'll still be there years from now."

Another benefit of SIOS software, Roberts continued, is that installation and set-up was a quick and hassle-free process. Although HA protection of the theatre's overall operations may have seemed daunting, SIOS LifeKeeper was installed, configured, tested and in production within a few days. Roberts added: "As a Linux specialist, I appreciate the way SIOS helps me to grow Linux within infrastructures."

Throughout the deployment of SIOS software, the eSpida team enjoyed the support of UK Solutions Centre Open Minds. "The main benefit of Open Minds is the quality of support they provide when you phone up with a problem," said Roberts. "You talk straight away to highly skilled technology-minded people who know exactly what you're talking about, exactly how you've implemented and are using the product. Open Minds condensed the whole process very quickly." The Systems Administrator tests the servers weekly, performing a switchover so that each system gets a turn to be fully in service for a week.

For the first six months of operation, Magson noted, one of the servers was freezing up about once a month. In each case, LifeKeeper failed over to the secondary server in under a minute. The few initial instances of server failure went largely unnoticed, thanks to LifeKeeper.

The Result

"We are very pleased with the recovery time," said Magson. "SIOS Protection Suite is very simple, very effective and extremely easy to use. It does what it is supposed to do and we are happy with it."

Open Minds commented, "eSpida has worked with us for many years now. They are highly trained professionals and have the expertise to take on a major project such as the Hippodrome. LifeKeeper enables them to provide a total solution that includes hardware, installation, as well as supplementary services related to disaster recovery."

About SIOS

SIOS delivers innovative software solutions that provide application high availability and disaster protection for Windows and Linux environments.

SIOS clustering software provides the flexibility to build clusters to protect your choice of Windows or Linux environment – and any configuration (or combination) of physical, virtual and cloud (public, private, and hybrid) storage – without sacrificing performance or availability.

Founded in 1999, SIOSTechnology Corp., is headquartered in San Mateo, California, and has offices throughout the United States, and in the United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore, and Japan.



<http://us.sios.com>
@SIOSTech | +1.650.645.7000