

Jiffy Lube Drives Toward Success with NAS

by

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Navigating the Network Infrastructure

With more than 2,000 service centers located in 49 states, Jiffy Lube International, Inc. is the largest franchising organization in the fast oil change and fluid maintenance industry. Specifically, our operation, Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube, encompasses all of the Jiffy Lube outlets in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties. When customers come to us, they already have an expectation of the Jiffy Lube experience: quick, dependable, and inclusive service for a low price. In order to provide our customers with this exceptional experience at our service centers, it is important to begin at the roots: Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube's corporate office in Arroyo Grande, California. The corporate office acts as the "nerve center," and is responsible for overseeing the operations of all the service centers, including inventory management, customer service issues, accounts receivable, accounts payable, and payroll. Our data storage requirements are significant due to a growing customer base and extensive inventory management system. This data must then be made available to all our service locations. For example, we store customer and inventory information here at the corporate office and update it on a nightly basis. Each of our service centers must be able to access this information 24 hours, seven days a week, so they have the critical data they need for their day to day operations. To conduct this coordinated effort, Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube required a network infrastructure that could store large amounts of data and make it continuously accessible to all the service centers.

Meeting the Challenges of the Information Highway

When considering the options available to meet our storage requirements, we were looking for the same qualities that characterized the Jiffy Lube operation: cost-effectiveness, simplicity, and speed. With oil and labor prices constantly rising in our industry, the prospect of replacing our servers and workstations on a frequent basis was extremely unappealing and made no business sense. We wanted to implement a solution that could easily and cost-effectively scale along with our operation. Expanding the servers was another possibility. However, since Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube encompasses quite a few service centers, adding servers would have been a very expensive proposition. Our lack of high-end technical knowledge and an IT person made this option even less attractive. Without a network administrator to manage our infrastructure for us, the quality of simplicity became very important. We wanted a solution that was out of the box, plug and play, regardless of user experience level. Lastly, we needed to improve the speed of our network, enabling faster data sharing between our corporate office and our service centers. The qualities of network-attached storage fit ideally with our needs. We evaluated NAS products from several different vendors with a focus on the above criteria, as well as reliability and performance. After a thorough competitive analysis, we selected the POPnetserver 2000 from the FIA Storage Systems Group, a San Clemente-based supplier of NAS systems.

Mapping out the Benefits of NAS

When we were first informed of the ease of installation of NAS appliances, we were skeptical. However, the system proved to be extremely simple to install and use, even for the computer novices in our office. Our POPnetserver 2000 was configured with two 30GB hard drives for a total capacity of 60GB, and expandable to a third drive. The POPnetserver 2000's overall storage capacity is 240GB in the same 1U enclosure. In 15 minutes and two mouse clicks, I had the system up and running. The accompanying POPassist software, a Windows-based user interface for system administration, allowed me to quickly and easily

configure the device. The software also provided us with the ability to remotely monitor and manage our storage resources in real time. The POPnetserver is currently being used across all Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube's departments. In addition to providing high capacity storage for numerous workstations, we are also using the POPnetserver to run our extensive inventory management system and accounting database.

Since implementing NAS, we have benefited from enhanced network performance and highly efficient file serving. The POPnetserver has improved the speed and functionality of our entire local network. Before the installation of the system, we often experienced slowdowns in data availability. This was due to the fact that a large amount of data was being shared from workstation to workstation, and we had insufficient storage capacity on our server to handle it. Since NAS systems relocate storage onto its own independent platform and separate file sharing from application serving, this freed up file server bandwidth and reduced the overhead on our existing application servers. Once we had a NAS system in place, the speed of our network increased drastically, saving us up to two hours a day in network wait time. And for a cost of approximately 1.5 cents per megabyte of network-attached storage, the system's value proposition was strong.

As far as reliability was concerned, we were able to rely on several features to ensure the integrity and accessibility of our data. Our POPnetserver was configured for RAID 1, also known as mirroring. This allowed the second set of drives to duplicate the first set for maximum data protection. We have peace of mind because we are ensured that our critical customer and inventory data is always secure. With a price of \$895, this POPnetserver's price-to-performance ratio was better than any other NAS system we evaluated. In competing NAS products, RAID would have cost Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube upwards of \$1,500.

A Smart Investment for the Road Ahead

The POPnetserver 2000 NAS system was an excellent investment for Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube. We no longer experience the downtime, frustration, and lost productivity and profitability that results from insufficient data storage. In addition, its high performance and reliability have truly contributed to increased data integrity for our company. NAS provides us with the file sharing capabilities we need to ensure that all our service centers have an open information pipeline to the corporate office, 24 hours, seven days a week. As our storage requirements continue to grow alongside our business, POPnetserver will be our first choice for future data storage needs.

About the Author

Sean Porcher is the Director of Operations for Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube, Inc., (PCJL) based in Arroyo Grande, CA. He brings over six years of management experience to the company, where he is responsible for the operation and performance of PCJL and all its service centers. Mr. Porcher holds a B.S. Degree in Business Administration and International Management, and an MBA in General Management, both from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Mr. Porcher can be reached by phone at (805) 489-5779 or via e-mail at porcher@pcjl.com.

Company Facts

Organization: Pacific Coast Jiffy Lube, Inc.

Industry: Automotive

Application: Data storage and file sharing for customer databases, inventory management and accounting information

Challenges:

- Insufficient storage capacity to meet significant storage requirements
- Slowdowns in data availability
- No IT staff

Solution: POPnetserver 2000 NAS system (60 GB configuration).

Key Benefits:

- Improved network speed for faster file sharing (up to two hours a day in network wait time saved)
- Assured data reliability with RAID protection
- Expandability for future data storage needs
- Cost-effective solution

About FIA Storage Systems Group

Headquartered in San Clemente, California, the FIA Storage Systems Group develops and markets an innovative line of network-attached storage (NAS) appliances. Founded in 2000 by a team of seasoned technology entrepreneurs, the FIA Storage Systems Group develops proprietary NAS technologies that deliver the high levels of performance, availability, and reliability demanded by today's information-centric economy. FIA is a wholly owned subsidiary of Wearnes Technology Corporation, a billion dollar organization that is ranked among the top 100 companies by market capitalization on the Singapore Exchange Securities Trading Limited (SGX-ST). Additional information about FIA can be found by visiting the company's web site at www.popnetserver.com.
