

## Alliance Homes Group Case Study

### • Alliance Homes Group

Alliance Homes Group is a social enterprise operating in the West of England, which was established in 2006 to manage homes that were transferred from North Somerset Council. The enterprise currently owns and manages around 6,500 homes, employs 400 staff and provides housing and housing-related support to around 12,000 people.

As well as providing homes that are affordable, Alliance Homes also works in partnership with local, regional and national agencies, to deliver a range of care and support services to help individuals get the most out of life.

### • Approaching End of Life Storage

For the previous 5 years, Alliance Homes had been running 2 x HP 4500 SAN solution's that were getting close to capacity. Alliance were experiencing some performance issues in their environment and upon analysis, they discovered that their IOPS were almost at the limit of what the HP's could provide.

With the environment at Alliance being so heavily virtualised (with both server and full desktop virtualisation), it meant that the company was very write-intensive and a solution was required that would give better performance overall.

### • A Venture into SSD Storage

Alliance started doing some research into the current storage products in the marketplace. It was imperative that any new solution had to perform to current expectations with capacity to spare. They also had to be sure that any expenditure on storage would last at least 3-5 years.

Alliance mapped out what their existing storage was and what their predicted growth would be over the coming years, and then gave a brief to a number of suppliers and providers. Cristie Data were the only ones to suggest Nimble Storage.

"One of the big advantages of Nimble was the fact that it was hybrid," commented Philip Hill, IT Systems Analyst at Alliance Homes. "It offered us a way of dipping our toe into SSD storage without the expense of a pure SSD SAN." With Nimble, if the data gets 'hot' and is hit by a lot of users or systems over and over again, it will be copied onto SSD cache and kept there. When the data cools down, Nimble will remove it from the cache. Another big advantage of Nimble is it's monitoring of this caching, which allows Alliance to analyse their data and intelligently permanently pin it to cache if they felt that it would be better served from SSD.



**Alliance Homes  
Group**

### Challenges

- Existing HP storage environment running out of capacity
- Performance issues due to IOPS being almost at their limit

### Solution

- Nimble CS300 array, dual controller, 1GB ISCSI
- Nimble Storage InfoSight

### Benefits

- Intelligent movement of data onto and back from SSD, with 97% hit rate
- No more performance complaints from staff
- Plenty of capacity for at least the next 3-5 years
- Administration directly from their VMware familiar environment
- Easy creation of LUN's



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Storage / Virtualisation  
Backup / Recovery / Protection

## • Cristie Data - The Right Partner

Alliance first met Cristie Data at an industry tradeshow and the two companies kept in touch, despite there being no immediate requirements.

When Cristie recommended Nimble Storage it was important that the right due diligence was carried out on the product, so Alliance did some research themselves and they liked what they found. But equally important for Alliance, was the due diligence on the people they'd be partnering with. "More than anything I liked Cristie Data. I found them to be easy going and not pushy, and I thought to myself 'these are people I could really work with.'" commented Hill. "When you're making an investment that will last 3-5 years you have to be confident in that relationship, and over the years Cristie had built that trust."

## • A Big Win for Nimble

Since the Nimble SAN has been implemented, Hill knows it's performing well, because performance issues and complaints caused by outgrowing their previous SAN have all gone away. Hill has a wall board outside his server room and the hit rate from SSD is around 97% minimum which he is really pleased with. Nimble continually assesses and fine tunes performance parameters.

Hill has no concerns over capacity any more. Because of the way the system compresses data, Hill thinks they have about 35TB of capacity which will serve him well for at least the next 3 years. "I'm really happy with it," commented Hill. "When you're spending your company's money you don't want to let anyone down. I was always confident that Nimble would be the right fit for us, and I was always confident that Cristie would be the right partner for us - one that I knew we could work with. Cristie is fairly local and we have a great relationship with our account manager."

The Nimble SAN has a plug-in that feeds directly into Alliance's virtual environment, so Hill can administer the Nimble SAN from the same familiar environment that he's used to with his VMware. This is really important for Alliance. Hill can scroll along to the Nimble tab, where he can directly manage it and quickly create storage volumes. "When we were creating LUN's in HP there were several steps involved, you had to create it in HP, then in VMware, then join them together," explained Hill. "I don't have to do that now. With Nimble, I can just create a LUN using the console and there it is, ready to use. I like that. It's easy to administer."

Another big win for Nimble was that all the licencing was included for all of the features. "I'd been bitten by this before" continued Hill. "It's not a case of you want it to do X, and it can do X, but you have to buy a licence to unlock it. With Nimble it's all there, all of the time."

## • Proactive Support Making Life Simpler

The Nimble implementation was straightforward, however there was a problem... A few days after installation it transpired that there was a faulty controller. The Nimble SAN has 2 controllers and can run on 1 quite easily. A call was logged with Nimble Support who dialled in remotely, detected the faulty controller and immediately sent out a replacement.

"The support of the Nimble team was second to none, it was really, really great support," commented Hill. "They stayed on the phone and talked me through every step in replacing the controller, and then they configured it remotely."

Alliance Homes are not a business critical organisation, but any system problems they experience can be inconvenient. Alliance pride themselves on delivering a good level of customer service and they keep a record of their system availability which is generally around 98%-99%, and that's because of the systems they have and the way they operate.

The only other time Alliance have had to contact Nimble Support was when one of their SSD drives failed. "We had an email from Nimble overnight saying we'd lost a disk and to contact them to arrange shipping," explained Hill. "I got into work in the morning, rang Nimble and it was dealt with, which is great. We've now changed it on the system - and this is something I picked up from the free Nimble training course at Cristie - so if a disk goes in the future, they won't phone us they'll just ship it straight to us. And I love that, that's the way it should be."

"I am really pleased with my SAN," added Hill. "My Nimble's brilliant and takes up less space in my racks. If it came down to it and I had to purchase another, I will certainly favour Nimble - it just sits there in the rack, doing its thing and getting on with it!"

"We have a great partnership with Alliance," concluded Peter Bennett, Business Development Manager at Cristie Data. "We knew that the Nimble was a really good fit for them and it's really rewarding to know that it has surpassed their expectations."