

The Government's Glass House

Building a Transparent IT Infrastructure Requires a Solid Foundation



Manuel Alonso, Assistant Director of Information Technology, IGAE



Accounting for Responsibilities at IGAE

As an administrative and executive body of public accounting, IGAE is responsible for providing reliable, comprehensive, professional, and independent accounting information on the public administration and delineating necessary regulations for its adequate development. It also draws up the public spending budget following the SEC 95 methodology, which allows for comparisons with other European Union member countries and analysis. In addition, it is charged with the programming, design, and execution of IT policies of the Spanish General Secretariat of Budgets and Expenditure and those of the Comptroller.

What does the government do with our money?" Almost every taxpayer in the world asks this question.

In Spain, citizens turn to the General State Comptroller (IGAE), based in Madrid, which operates within the Treasury Department at the Ministry of Economy and Finance. IGAE is responsible for the internal control, administration, and management of public

By Gerry Goldschmidt

accounts. As an internal control body, it verifies that, through previous legal and financial control, public spending abides by legislative, economic, efficient, and effective principles.

IGAE faces a list of IT challenges that nearly every IT organization will recognize: (1) increase availability; (2) rapidly add new services; (3) digitize paper-based processes and make them available online; and (4) enable greater agility and flexibility. In order to address these challenges, the IT orga-

nization at IGAE made technology standardization a core initiative, with the objective of centralizing and simplifying IT operations and management.

Manuel Alonso, the assistant director of information technology at IGAE, has played an important role in making this initiative a reality.

Alonso elaborates on some specific details associated with this larger challenge: "I believe our challenge is to serve the public need by making information more widely and quickly available.

However, in order to make more information available to the public, we had to address some basic issues with availability. And we needed to make some of the services we provide to our employees such as email more effective, thereby enabling them to be more responsive.”

Accommodating the public eye

The IGAE IT team undertook a consolidation of its data center in 2002, with the purpose of increasing processing capacity and making storage easier to provision. This required an integrated and flexible storage infrastructure that would utilize storage capacities more efficiently. “We needed to eliminate single points of failure and increase availability,” Alonso explains. “Administering a single pool of storage would also assist us in bringing new services online faster to provide users with the information they wanted.”

Alonso and his team turned to Symantec for help. “Once we decided what we needed to do,” Alonso says, “we found the Veritas Data Center Foundation solution from Symantec gave us the flexibility to optimize our storage infrastructure and make us more responsive to users.”

To further increase availability, the organization decided to cluster stand-alone servers that were hosting critical applications and databases using Veritas Cluster Server HA/DR software.

Protecting the public trust

Besides offering new user-facing Web services, Alonso and his team seized the opportunity to digitize many processes that were previously paper-based. The objective was to become more efficient and responsive. But this also meant that critical data rapidly multiplied. “Users trust us with their information only if they are certain it will

“I believe that government is committed to being transparent to its public by making information more widely and quickly available.”

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be preserved and protected,” Alonso says.

With decentralized backup-and-restore operations, the team sought to standardize, centralize, and enhance them. To accomplish this, the IGAE team chose Veritas NetBackup software in 2002, and it has since provided a virtually 100 percent success rate for backup and recoveries.

Taming email

Email has also become critical at IGAE for moving work ahead and serving constituents. “But it is also a double-edged sword. Email was piling up in users’ inboxes, slowing down systems and making it difficult to find the really important business information hidden in those piles of emails. The IGAE team needed to implement an email archiving solution that would free employees from worrying about the size of their inboxes and which emails to delete in order to stay below a quota.”

In addition, spam was a problem, slowing responsiveness and forcing users to manually sort and delete hundreds of frequently offensive messages. It also contributed to the out-of-control growth of email inboxes.

In order to address these challenges, Alonso and his team elected to leverage the Symantec Information Foundation solution. They initially deployed a Symantec Mail Security 8300 appliance at the gateway and Symantec Brightmail AntiSpam software on the organization’s email servers

to block unwanted email. As a result, the team is now stopping 85 percent of spam, which is directly contributing to employee productivity.

Then, in order to gain control over email storage and enable users to quickly find the information they need, Alonso and his team implemented Symantec Enterprise Vault software in 2006. Symantec Consulting Services assisted in the solution deployment. The single-instance storage capabilities of Enterprise Vault have enabled IGAE to reduce the volume of stored email by 70 percent and make the full text of messages and attachments searchable.

“We have better control of our data now and more flexibility in how we provide information to people,” Alonso sums up. “We can make that information available on the Web, protect it better, and get it where it’s needed more easily through email. In these ways, we’re better able to serve the public interest.” ■

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