IT Built to Last

Erecting business with an IT foundation at Danya Cebus

Innovation is something for which Danya Cebus LTD, a multinational construction firm based in Israel, is known. The company is recognized for bringing high tech to the construction industry, one that is highly complex and heavily reliant on technology. Indeed, Danya Cebus often is one of the first construction companies to employ new technological tools—from software, to sophisticated equipment and materials, to creative construction techniques. “Much of this revolves around IT, and what we’ve been able to accomplish,” says Tal Natanovitch, the company’s chief information officer and head of the Project Management Office (PMO).

Danya Cebus’ overarching vision asserts that “there can be no construction culture without strong foundations.” For Natanovitch and his IT and PMO teams, they have their steel columns in place, helping to enable a unique and thriving culture of innovation and success. Natanovitch joined Danya Cebus about eight and a half years ago, starting in the Budget Control Office. “When I joined the company, it was as an individual contributor,” he says. “After a year, I was named manager of the department.” In 2007, he took an opportunity to gain management experience outside of Israel overseeing IT and project management in Romania. The scope of his responsibilities included line of business for country operations. The company brought him back to Israel in 2009 as CIO and head of the PMO—the position he currently holds.

Natanovitch possesses a diverse background spanning finance, IT, and operations that has aided him throughout the evolution of his career. Reporting to the chief financial officer, Natanovitch’s keen understanding of business process and project management controls has been critical to his success, particularly since he has a very lean team. IT alone consists of five staff and two developers; his remaining 13 headcount are in the PMO. Heading the IT department for Natanovitch is Gabby Rokach, a 13-year Danya Cebus veteran who has been in that role for nearly five years.

While lean, the Danya Cebus IT staff manages a huge number of applications and systems enabling an even larger set of construction projects and business initiatives. “We have 22 different applications, 18 of which are custom-developed solutions,” Natanovitch says. “Our IT systems currently support more than 600 users and 85 project sites scattered across myriad locations in Asia and Europe.”
Architecting data
When Natanovitch returned to Israel as CIO and head of the PMO, he pinpointed several key business requirements that he wanted his team to tackle. “Data was growing rapidly throughout the business,” he recalls. Recent growth in mobile devices for Danya Cebus has exacerbated this challenge. For example, consider the work conducted by construction project managers who rely on an application called Work Manager to manage their projects offline on their laptops and tablets when on site at projection locations and then later on synchronize the data to the corporate network. “It’s not only about securing the device,” Rokach says. “It’s about protecting the information.”

Since 2006, Danya Cebus has relied upon Symantec Backup Exec for data backup and recovery. The company previously used CA ARCserve but required a more robust solution to accommodate growing data volumes. “Backup Exec has evolved with our business,” Rokach notes. In 2010, the IT team elected to upgrade to Backup Exec 2010 to take advantage of deduplication and integrated virtualization support and recently migrated to Backup Exec 2012.

Deduplication was an important feature that is delivering substantial value for Danya Cebus. It starts with the backup windows. Prior to the upgrade to Backup Exec 2010, backup windows sometimes pushed beyond 24 hours and into business operations. “It is now 10 hours or less,” Rokach reports. The amount of storage has been reduced as well. “Deduplication cut our storage store in half—from 20 terabytes to 10 terabytes,” he notes. Just as important, the solution is proving to be highly reliable: each quarter, as required by regulations, Danya Cebus conducts a recovery fire drill procedure to confirm that the solution is operating successfully. “It has passed every time,” Rokach quips.

In 2009, Danya Cebus elected to move in the direction of virtualization and integrated deduplication and virtual environments and recently migrated to VMware. We have a single panel view across both our physical and virtual environments and can restore to each.” Rokach also reports that the new user interface is aiding the team in establishing backup policies.

Constructing an archive
Dealing with rapid growth in Microsoft Exchange data was another issue Natanovitch and Rokach sought to address in late 2010. “We had email scattered all over our environment—from our Exchange servers to PST files on individual laptops and desktops,” Rokach remembers. PST files were a particular problem. The company’s Exchange store was virtually runaway, accounting for 1.8 terabytes of storage. Further exacerbating the problem were PSTs, which Rokach reports were slightly more than one terabyte at the time.

Without the ability to archive email, Danya Cebus had implemented quotas. Many users spent valuable time cleaning their mailboxes each day to manage their quota limits, simply to keep email going. Others adopted a blunter instrument for email management; they simply deleted important messages, an activity that violated corporate email retention policies. Users also frequently opened help desk support tickets for help restoring email. “This consumed a couple hours each week,” Rokach says.

The Danya Cebus team conducted a thorough assessment of different solutions and chose Symantec Enterprise Vault. Symantec Partner Ankor Systems assisted with the architecture design and implementation.

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Enterprise Vault Exchange Journaling is used for real-time archiving, and Microsoft Exchange PST Migrator was employed to migrate all of the disparate PST files into the centralized archive that runs on NetApp storage.

Natanovitch reports that Danya Cebus has seen business benefits on a number of fronts. “We’ve reduced our Exchange and PST archives by nearly 1.5 terabytes,” he says. IT staff are also much more productive; the two or three hours spent each week restoring email can now be done by end users. “And because it is all in a central archive, versus scattered across individual clients, we have the ability to manage everything centrally and know that we have discovered all emails on a particular subject when we do need to conduct eDiscovery,” Natanovitch says.

While the legal department still comes to the IT team for support for performing email discovery, the process is dramatically streamlined with Enterprise Vault. “It previously took several days to a week to fulfill a legal request,” Rokach says. “We can now perform the eDiscovery in less than an hour.”

Security built from the endpoint to gateway

Another area Natanovitch and Rokach wanted to bolster is security. Danya Cebus recently upgraded to Endpoint Protection 12.1 to gain additional performance advantages for scans on virtualized servers. “The performance is terrific,” Rokach says. “The management interface is a lot easier to use, and scanning is a much less resource-intensive task. We are able to ensure the security of our virtual machines without sacrificing performance.”

Danya Cebus recently added a Symantec Message Gateway appliance powered by Brightmail. The prior solution allowed too much spam and malicious code through
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Enabling construction culture

Quality is at the center of Danya Cebus’ 78-year history. The company prides itself on doing it right the first time around on the basis that the approach not only is good for the customer but saves time and money. Of course, the PMO headed by Natanovitch is a critical enabler. The process controls and best practices Natanovitch and his PMO team work to institute on the job site cascade to the IT department as well. “The same principles we employ on the construction site often apply in how we architect, build, and manage IT solutions,” Natanovitch observes.

These combine to form a construction culture that permeates all facets of the company’s operations. “IT is a centerpiece of what the company does,” Natanovitch sums up. “The same principles we follow in construction—from collaborative innovation to relentless execution—guide our efforts around IT.”

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Other instances. Natanovitch and his team collaborated with groups from finance, legal, and human resources to identify policies and then determine what level of governance to place over them.

Constructing with Symantec

> Symantec Protection Suite
> Symantec Endpoint Protection
> Symantec Message Gateway Appliance powered by Brightmail
> Symantec Data Loss Prevention
> Symantec Backup Exec
> Symantec Enterprise Vault
> Symantec Partners: Netcom and Ankor Systems