

Gordon Aluminum Case Study

Schofield, WI

CASE STUDY

It's human nature to look for a silver lining in a dark cloud in the hope that difficult times will lead to brighter days. The dark clouds that gathered over Gordon Aluminum were all too real, bringing a lightning strike that resulted in a fire that destroyed the firm's offices. Computers, phone system and data were lost in the process, and the firm's disaster recovery solution was not yet in place.

But the fact that Gordon Aluminum had begun working toward a new disaster recovery solution provided a ray of sunshine amid the gloom. RMM Solutions had been helping the firm document its existing systems amid designing a disaster recovery system that would provide immediate failover in case of disaster. Although implementation of the system was still a month away at the time of the fire, the legwork enabled Gordon Aluminum to recover relatively quickly.

"Part of the planning for the secondary system involved RMM becoming very familiar with our current system. That knowledge of what we had and what we were moving to was indispensable," said A.J. Gordon, President, Gordon Aluminum. "It would have been extremely difficult to re-create the system laid out on paper with RMM, they had a roadmap to follow."

"On top of that, their response was immediate. They were onsite at my house at 9 o'clock on a Sunday night to map out what needed to be done so they could hit the ground running Monday morning. That's what stood out in my mind — that level of service. We had no idea what we were going to walk into when we got access to the burn site. It was extremely important to have them there to give us options and determine what they could do to get us back on track."

Out of the Darkness

Based in Schofield, Wisconsin, Gordon Aluminum provides customized, single-source aluminum part manufacturing. Because its customers depend upon prompt delivery, the firm had determined that it needed a zero-downtime backup solution. Delay is simply unacceptable.



"If we don't ship parts to a customer for two days their line shuts down for two days," said Gordon. "We simply cannot afford to put our customers in that position, so we based our recovery time objectives on their requirements."

Gordon Aluminum was working with RMM to design a secondary computing solution that would eliminate the need to purchase and set up new servers and reload applications and data should disaster strike — a process that could easily take two weeks. RMM proposed a solution that mirrored the firm's production systems with real-time data backup. In the event of a disaster, the systems would automatically failover and the firm would continue to function with zero data loss.

"We had ordered the system from RMM and were preparing an offsite area in a separate building on our property. We were maybe a month away from completing the implementation," Gordon said. "In the interim we had a fire. Of course our initial concern was making sure nobody was hurt, and then determining if our manufacturing processes were affected. Then when we looked at the business portion of the company, we realized that the bulk of our computing network, our phone system and business systems hardware had been wiped out by fire."

"After a moment of panic we got our heads together and called RMM. They came over to discuss what we could do to get a system up and



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running quickly, and were instrumental in getting us back on our feet in a very short period of time.”

A Helping Hand

Of vital importance was reestablishing communications with customers so that Gordon Aluminum could take orders and account for products as they shipped. The next step was to get the network up and running so that the firm had communication between the plant and the office, and could record new orders and shipments and account for them. RMM provided both expertise and manpower to help with this enormous task, and helped the Gordon Aluminum team move forward with some of its technology plans.

“We mobilized our people and deployed loaner equipment which included a Cisco phone system, switches, VMware and an HP server. They were up and running in less than 2 days — before their local utilities had electricity and phone lines running to the building,” said Rimon Moses, Chief Executive Officer, RMM Solutions.

“We had been planning to move to a VMware environment and by necessity that was put to the forefront,” said Jeff Henslee, IT Manager, Gordon Aluminum. “They helped us move to VMware and made sure we have the infrastructure in place to support our business systems. In less than two weeks our ERP environment was available again.”

“Jeff and his team were obviously very capable of handling our day-to-day operations, but there were so many things to be done that we just didn’t have the bandwidth. Knowledge of the system was key but we also appreciated the availability of RMM’s IT professionals to aid us in everything that had to be done from bottom to top,” said Gordon.

Lessons Learned

Of course, the disaster recovery solution is an even more important part of Gordon Aluminum’s IT strategy. The firm leveraged RMM’s



extensive product knowledge to hone in on the right solution for its IT environment and recovery time objectives.

“RMM provided estimates of how long it would take to recover systems in various scenarios,” Gordon said. “It’s not feasible for an in-house IT staff to keep up with all the latest products. RMM was very helpful in presenting options for us to choose from.”

Sometimes fate doesn’t give you any options, as Gordon Aluminum learned all too well. Still it’s possible to find a silver lining in the dark cloud of disaster, through lessons learned and the promise of new opportunities.

“I think one of the big lessons is that when you sit down and plan your DR system you don’t actually plan on having a disaster. You go at it with the attitude that you’ll feel safe once it’s done but until then nothing bad is going to happen. You don’t pay much attention to the current system because you’re coming into something new and better, and that false sense of security caught us. My advice is to make sure your current systems and processes are being followed and functioning as they should even while you’re designing a new solution,” Gordon said.

“And even though the disaster recovery system wasn’t in place, having gone through the process of designing it really did put us ahead. And because it was a total loss we had the opportunity to completely revamp the system. Having an implementation partner who understands our business requirements helped us get the best bang for our buck. With RMM’s help we will actually end up in a better position from an IT perspective than we were before the fire.”



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