

Customer Case Study



Taking Hearthstone to the Cloud

“Syncplicity takes the thinking out of syncing. It’s transparent to user—there are no steps they have to take.”

Robert Meltz, Chief Technology Officer, Hearthstone, Inc.

Hearthstone pioneered the concept of pension fund investment in residential development and homebuilding and was one of the first sources of institutional capital dedicated exclusively to this sector. Headquartered in Los Angeles with offices in San Francisco, San Diego and Chicago, “Hearthstone is the epitome of a SMB with multiple locations, field personnel, and telecommuters,” explains Robert Meltz, Chief Technology Officer of the thirty-person company.

Like most CTOs today, Meltz faces the “Consumerization of IT,” or the shift toward employee-driven technology adoption that signals a need for change in the way IT supports their end-users. “In the last couple of years,” Meltz explains, “people are working with more than the standard office PC. We’re traveling with laptops and using tablets and smartphones. We need anytime, anywhere

access—on multiple devices—to up-to-date files for productivity and collaboration.”

Meeting this need with a VPN and employees manually syncing their files wasn’t working. The challenges with this process were threefold: launching the VPN was time-consuming, syncing the files while off-network was cumbersome, and enforcing and tracking file-syncing at the user level was nearly impossible.

“We had trouble supporting offline file access for laptops out in the field and in remote offices. An individual might have thousands of files of both active and research data to keep in sync with corporate—and they weren’t always doing it,” Meltz revealed. He found that because the old method required users to maintain their VPN connection while the application updated their offline files, the process

Challenges:

- Provide employees in multiple locations with anytime, anywhere access to updated files
- Support the various devices (PCs, laptops, tablets, and smartphones) employees use to access data
- Replace slow and outdated VPN-based connection to corporate assets
- Enable IT to enforce and manage remote employees’ access to files

Results:

- Employees can access files/data from various devices
- Automatic syncing – employees don’t need to do anything to get files to sync
- Internal controls for IT management
- IT can support users

was frustrating and, as Meltz said, “often led to premature terminations of the process—or avoidance all together—by the user.”

“If critical files are not getting synchronized,” he adds, “then employees in the field aren’t getting the information they need to do their jobs properly. That affects our bottom line: no data, no business.”

A Solution in the Cloud

Meltz set out to find a solution

enabling real-time, automatic synchronization of data between field telecommuters and branch office personnel that required no end user involvement. In addition to providing employees with anytime, anywhere access to data, he wanted a quick setup, easy-to-use administrator controls, dependable file backup and top-notch security. "I quickly found that a cloud-based system was the right answer to my problem." Meltz says.

An article in a trade publication led him to Syncplicity, which soon emerged as the perfect fit for Hearthstone. In fact, Meltz claimed "after reviewing the alternatives, Syncplicity quickly appeared as the one solution that met all of my criteria." Deployed in early 2011, Syncplicity took Meltz just minutes to set up on the client. "It has a very small, quick install and has a light footprint on the client in terms of its interface," he said.

Having centralized controls—enabling him to set permissions and manage user accounts—has made his job easier. He said he appreciates being able to "make employees privy to different files and folders on servers and monitoring access, all via Syncplicity's IT Administration Console."

Also making Syncplicity an easy choice is the added benefit of cloud-based file backup, essential for disaster recovery. "In a disaster," Meltz, says, "it won't take hours or days to recover files; through an

Internet connection, my users can access files immediately from the Syncplicity cloud." That's because Syncplicity stores multiple versions of each file, all online.

As for data security, Meltz said what set Syncplicity apart from its competitors is that "they're SAS 70 Type II Compliant. Their data centers meet the most rigorous standards for protection of data security, data access and internal controls—so that data isn't lost, and customers have no downtime." Plus, all data is protected with military-grade encryption.

Making an Impact on Business

Syncplicity has had significant business benefits for Hearthstone. "File access is much easier for employees," he observes. "We've saved untold hours of time now that our field workers, satellite offices and telecommuters are no longer required to launch a VPN and wait for an offline file sync to complete. With Syncplicity, the synchronization occurs in the background with no user intervention or VPN required."

Meltz specifies that "Syncplicity is responsible for replicating 236,469 files between our remote offices and field personnel and the folder-level controls allow me to segment what data is shared on each client."

Further, Syncplicity has "reduced our VPN traffic by 62%, and most importantly, the average number of 'in-sync' files on our sampled clients went from just 71% using our previous method to

100% using Syncplicity.

Now, important files aren't getting lost. "In the past, it was a real challenge for I.T. to monitor the level of synchronization among the client machines."

Meltz recalls. "Consider the number of files 'saved' through Syncplicity that would otherwise have not been synchronized and backed-up for extended periods. Now, it is done in real-time over any live internet connection."

At least one benefit to using Syncplicity has been unexpected: "A nice feature of Syncplicity is it gives us the ability to share large files—those that would typically exceed size limits—through e-mail by creating sharable links," says Meltz. "The recipient clicks a link in an e-mail and connects to the Syncplicity server to view the file."

Meltz adds that "we're looking forward to using it in conjunction with our SharePoint Server and integrating it with our corporate domain authentication."

Meltz credits Syncplicity for helping Hearthstone manage the trend toward IT consumerization, making it easier for IT to support almost every computer and mobile device employees bring on board to access corporate resources. "Now, with Syncplicity, I can provide users access to their files via a web browser, their computers, mobile phones and iPads safely and securely."