When Data Can Do Good

For the Make-A-Wish Foundation, two key IT partnerships help the nonprofit reserve crucial resources for children in need.

Approximately every 34 minutes, the Make-A-Wish Foundation— arguably one of the country's best-known nonprofits—makes a wish come true for a child in need. That wish could mean installing a baseball field in the backyard of a 10-year-old boy with neuromuscular disorder or giving a 7-year-old with a congenital heart disease a virtual trip to Saturn with the help of a former astronaut.

Since 1980, the Make-A-Wish Foundation has been a force of life-changing positivity for more than 285,000 kids with critical illnesses. And though the essence of its mission is simple, the work that goes into it is anything but. With 60 chapters across the United States and more than 33,000 volunteers—not to mention upwards of tens of thousands of beneficiaries annually—the Make-A-Wish Foundation relies on complex IT infrastructure to secure its data and ensure the success of its operations.

"The nature of our business can be very time-sensitive," says Travis Gibson, director of IT infrastructure, security and operations at Make-A-Wish Foundation. "Depending on the particular child we're working with, we often have emergency wishes or rush wishes, where there's a small window of time to be able to grant them for these critically ill children. So in the event of an outage, the ability to quickly recover data is absolutely crucial to our mission."

SIMPLIFYING INFRASTRUCTURE

The nonprofit relies on numerous types of data in the course of its day-to-day operations. Donor and sponsor data provides insight into the financial underpinnings that allow it to fulfill wishes, while patient health information sheds light on a wish child's family, medical eligibility and whether a particular wish is safe to grant. To ensure its data remains available, Make-A-Wish partnered with PhoenixNAP, an Arizona-based IT services provider that focused on simplifying the organization's data infrastructure.

"We worked with the Make-A-Wish team to design a service utilizing Veeam's software to replicate its production data to one of

our locations and into one of our cloud services as a target," says William Bell, executive vice president of products at PhoenixNAP. "We've chosen to leverage Veeam as the cornerstone of our backup and disaster recovery service delivery, so when we're working with customers like Make-A-Wish, we're using it to protect their data, shift capital expenditure to operating expenditure or help them achieve any other desired outcome."

WISHES COME TRUE

Make-A-Wish's partnership with Veeam and PhoenixNAP is at the heart of a broader rethink of the organization's IT infrastructure. Historically, the nonprofit has relied on a disparate technology ecosystem, with each of its 60 chapters managing its data and unique set of vendors in a silo. But in the last two years, it's made moves to centralize its IT operations, connecting the new infrastructure to PhoenixNAP's data centers and using Veeam's software to ensure availability between them.

"The more standardized we can get with our technology, the easier it becomes to secure that technology, to secure that data, and to manage and manipulate that data," Gibson says. "The more we can simplify IT management, the more we can reduce overhead and use funds for what they're meant for, which is wish fulfillment."

To date, Gibson estimates that the foundation has saved hundreds of thousands in operating costs. It granted more than 15,300 wishes in 2016, marking its biggest year in its nearly 40-year history. It also has vastly improved the speed of data recovery. In the event of a major disaster, complete recovery now takes three hours or less— minutes that matter for an organization dealing with terminally ill children.

"In our business, we often have to decide whether to spend money on technology or wish fulfillment," Gibson says. "We've recently turned a corner where we can protect our data, protect our wish families and do it in the most frugal manner possible. PhoenixNAP and Veeam are a huge part of that."