How to view a Microsoft VSS snapshot in Windows File Explorer

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Question

How can I verify what data is captured in a Windows VSS Shadow Copy (snapshot) ?

Solution

First verify that you have a Shadow Copy (snapshot) to view, you can do this by running a 'vssadmin' command to list Shadow Copies.

```
vssadmin list shadows
```

If you do not see any Shadow Copies listed you can have vssadmin create one for you. We also use vssadmin to obtain our snapshots - we do NOT use the VSS GUI in Windows. The VSS service does not need to be started in Services, it simply needs to be installed.

The example below will take a snapshot of the C: drive. When this completes run the list command again to verify there is a snapshot. If you have any problems getting vssadmin to obtain a snapshot you will need to resolve that issue with Microsoft before continuing.

```
vssadmin create shadow /for=c:
```

Next you will need to install the Shadow Copy Client. Some Windows Server OS's have the client install package in the following path:
\windows\system32\clients\twclient\

If you do not have that package you can download it from Microsoft, here is a link:
http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/windowsserver/bb405951.aspx

Now go into the Windows File Explorer and right click the C: drive (or the drive you are working with). You should see an option called "Restore previous versions". Once you click on that you

should see the available Shadow Copies (snapshots), click on the one you want to view. This will allow you to see what is being captured by VSS.

Note: Some Windows Server OS's do not allow you to view the Shadow Copy directly on the Windows Server you are working with. In this case you must install the Previous Versions client on another Windows OS and then view the Shadow Copy over the network. If you don't have any of the hard drives or partitions shared on the network you can always use the Administrative Share (C$) if working with the C: drive.

Be sure to delete any snapshots you created manually, and it is a good practice to clear out all snapshots if there is no current backup running or the Shadow Copy service is not being used natively for other purposes outside of CDP. There are more options than deleting 'all', type 'vssadmin delete shadows' to see those options.

```
vssadmin delete shadows /all
```

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