STORServer

WHITE PAPER ›
BACKUP APPLIANCE TECHNOLOGY

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Simplify and save with an appliance approach to data backup

Mid-market enterprises remain abuzz with cost cutting expectations despite pressures to increase services. Automation of costly manual tasks could fit the bill for many of these computing shops, specifically in the data protection arena. The IT departments of the mid-market sector can take advantage of a proven cost savings opportunity in data protection that will also increase their new data recovery expectations.

Data recovery solutions should always include all three major areas for ensuring restores: backup, archive and disaster recovery. Buying technology to perform these three key functions separately creates huge divides in both management and successful implementation. And, skipping out on any one of these areas will leave the facility both vulnerable and out of compliance.

All three functions of data recovery have taken a giant leap in automation over the past few years as a result of a single technological development: backup appliances. Beyond bundling all of the components needed to handle data recovery, IT shops can now purchase this all-in-one data recovery solution designed for enterprise-class operations. Even the smallest businesses take on the requirements of enterprises: multiple platforms, remote offices, large numbers of users (at every level), separate retention expectations from different departments and a host of legal rules to follow.

The net result of an appliance is automation for all of these enterprise requirements and the inclusion of every data protection technology an IT department could want. The largest savings come to the mid-market, though, in the areas of pricing (sizing and configuration), implementation and operation. Not only can these IT departments save money in adopting an appliance strategy, but they will get all of those new technologies and enterprise capabilities at incredible savings.

Granted, costs are not the only thing IT is thinking about when buying a data protection solution. Sizing for an appliance shifts conversations from hardware and software (compatibility and preferences) to simple decisions around how big and how fast (scalability and performance). Users should be able to see the prices up front. Consider the lifecycle for such a purchase, typically three to five years, and make a decision based upon how much the current data backup solution already costs.

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When configuring and pricing an appliance, think about the following details. Rather than only giving the appliance vendor the "ideal" expectations, give them a minimum and maximum. This will help immeasurably during appliance manufacturer comparisons. Do not let a manufacturer or their reseller undersize or oversize your solution:

- How much data does the facility have:
    - Data files in terabytes
    - Databases that are run in terabytes
- Software licensing structures:
    - Pricing by the amount of data backed up or archived, or
    - Pricing by the number of machines or databases being backed up
- General retention policies
    - Number of days to be able to restore everything
    - Number of machines to be able to restore immediately
    - Number of years to keep archives
- Size and number of each remote office
    - Some facilities will not need a localized appliance, just software
    - Remote office solutions are based primarily on network pipes

Based on the above, it is easy to see that the configuration and sizing for an appliance shifts from talking about server size, storage arrays, etc. to the practical details of the environment, which is good news.

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When comparing appliance offerings from different vendors, concentrate on the implementation issues during decision-making, rather than cables and connectivity:

- Stability of the appliance manufacturer
- Delivery schedules
- Installation impact
- Support references

Once these details turn into specific choices from different appliance manufacturers, the comparison of options now turns to how the appliance will run in the facility's specific environment. At this point, consider technologies that should be available, including:

- Data deduplication offerings – both cost and methodology
- Replication capabilities – replicating the appliance itself, as well as backup copies
- VMware backup options – each customer is different, and virtual environments will change over time, so look at the options for both reasons
- Policy driven design – rather than just making copies of data, IT should be able to set rules that drive the automation

Operations of the selected backup appliance should bring the largest savings to IT shops. Since automation of manual tasks should remove hours spent on backups each day, and even days a week, expect that the appliance will now simply be a monitoring job rather than a constant flurry of data movement and tracking tasks. Users will be setting policies rather than looking for data and worrying about what did not get backed up.

While "soft" costs, such as staff time and skills are difficult to calculate when figuring savings for an IT purchase, in an appliance, these calculations become moot. The entire purpose of an appliance is to reduce a "parts and pieces" purchase, eliminate the expensive consulting cost to implement the solution and minimize the operations through automation, therefore eliminating the need to add in the savings of the soft costs.

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In essence, an appliance will save huge dollars up front on a purchase, and over time the automation built into appliance designs relieves managers from having to increase their annual budgets. The savings in hard to calculate soft costs will eventually take place, but simply end up as an added benefit to the more obvious savings in equipment, software, integration and implementation.

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By John Pearring, manager of sales for STORServer. As STORServer's president from 1995 to 2008, John built the original OEM alliances and the original e-business infrastructure for the company. https://storserver.com

ABOUT STORSERVER

STORServer is a leading provider of data protection solutions and offers the only enterprise data backup appliance that is built to order. Each backup appliance solution is tailored to the customer's unique environment to simplify management of complex backup, archive and disaster recovery needs. STORServer's appliances feature enterprise class data backup, archive and disaster recovery software, hardware, services and U.S.-based customer support. Companies of all sizes trust in STORServer's proven appliances to solve their most complex data protection problems. For more information on STORServer, please visit storserver.com.

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