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I D C E X E C U T I V E B R I E F

Is it Time to Update Your Backup?

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Updating your Backup: Introduction

There are many considerations that will undoubtedly run through the mind of an IT manager when they hear about yet another new storage functionality. Why touch a system that's already working? My backup system works well and has been reliable for many years, why put it at risk by implementing new technology now? While this might have been a reasonable approach in the past, it might not be a rational approach much longer. But why might this be the case?

- Firstly, data volumes continue to grow, even during tough economic times. In addition to this, there are signs that businesses are starting to grow again. With this in mind, IDC expects data volumes to grow at an accelerated pace. Do you have the cash and the space to keep up with data growth?
- Secondly, backup technology has taken some massive steps forward over the past three years, and can now offer much higher storage efficiency, improved management and reporting capabilities and better economics than before. Why not reap the benefits of technology progress and reduce storage costs?
- Thirdly, your IT infrastructure has been evolving. Most organisations have invested in server virtualisation, some in desktop virtualisation, but at the same time they have mainly found that backup has become much more complex. Modern backup solutions reduce the pain of protecting virtualised environments. Why not make your life easier by updating your backup infrastructure?
- Finally, information governance, risk and compliance are gaining in importance. A recent IDC survey found 42% of respondents planning an information GRC initiative in 2010. Are you prepared for your next audit?

In this IDC Executive Brief, IDC will discuss the trends, benefits and considerations that are relevant in the decision process around updating the backup infrastructure to enable you to determine whether now is the right time for you to look at updating your backup.

Backup Trends

One of the eminent truths in IT is that data volumes continue to grow, and, as IT advances and the world gets digitised, data is growing at an accelerated pace. IDC estimates that company data is growing at 30%–50% every year. About 80% of this data is file-based, unstructured data; the remainder is structured in databases.

Companies and regulators alike are becoming increasingly sensitive to the value of stored information, which in turn is becoming more complex to protect and manage due to its sheer volume.

This trend has been the catalyst for huge advances in the backup market, which has changed from being a single-tier "copy-to-tape" technology, into a multitier, disk-based technology with advanced functionality such as data deduplication and snapshots, and which is now on its way to the cloud. Several innovative technologies have transformed the backup market in recent years such as:

- **Single-instancing and data deduplication.** In the light of unabated data growth, data needs to be reduced wherever possible. This technology has evolved from single-instancing technologies, which remove the extra copies of a file, to data deduplication technologies, which remove duplicate blocks. Data deduplication can be applied either at the original source of the data (which is very important to do before sending data over a network or into the cloud) or at the media server or the storage target, where high performance is key. Modern backup technologies offer choice, because the combination of these various data reduction technologies is very powerful and provides the highest cost and disk space savings.
- **Snapshots.** Driven by the need to back up data quickly, as backup windows are shortening while data volumes are growing, many companies are turning to snapshot technologies to solve the problem. Snapshots are point-in-time copies of a live IT system and take only seconds to complete. Backup can be performed "offline" from the snapshot. This is particularly popular in virtual environments, where server performance is under pressure from backup streams of multiple virtual machines. Modern backup technologies handle heterogeneous virtual environments and integrate with storage arrays to utilise their snapshot capabilities without impacting server performance.
- **Management.** Understanding the structure and value of data through autodiscovery and indexing features enables companies to set compliant data management policies and increases the possibility for good and automated data management. Additionally, solid reporting tools are important in large and complex backup infrastructures. Current backup technologies maintain a strict policy-based management regime even in large-scale and complex environments and are able to manage third-party backup products as well.

Benefits of Updating your Backup

The advances made in the backup market are significant, as are the benefits that come from deploying new backup technologies.

- **Tame data growth.** Bucking the data growth trend will save you money because you can postpone your next storage array purchase, stay longer in your current datacenter and help get ready for the

cloud, because you are in control of your data and will only send manageable datasets to the cloud.

- **Protect virtual machines well.** Virtualisation has become mainstream, but data protection remains the main obstacle for the success of virtualisation projects. Virtual machine sprawl means either rocketing backup costs or no backup at all and can result in a surge in data growth and multiple backup streams that are degrading the performance of the virtual infrastructure. Protecting your virtual environments well with one backup technology will save you money because you are keeping the data footprint manageable, controlling the backup costs, and increasing the efficiency of the virtual infrastructure without adding new servers.
- **Reduce storage cost and improve SLAs.** Modern backup technologies will enable you to reduce your data footprint, save disk space and datacenter space, and manage your data efficiently across your whole backup infrastructure. Consequently, you can both save money and improve your service levels.

Considerations — Do I Need to Act Now?

If you have reached the following tipping points, updating your backup will be relevant to you:

- Data is growing at 30%–50% per year and if you continue to add capacity, you are going to run out of datacenter space.
- You have a distributed IT environment with branch offices and mobile workers who are sending their growing backups over the network to the central IT department.
- Virtualisation is a key part of your IT strategy but, while you are simplifying your server management, backup is becoming more complex.
- Cloud storage is of interest to you, but you don't know where to start or you are concerned about sending large data volumes across the network.

Any change to the IT infrastructure will induce risk, and a critical application like backup is no exception. On the other hand, incurring this risk is necessary to achieve the benefits that are to be had from upgrading or changing technology. If you decide to embark on a backup modernisation journey, ask your vendor for support. Backup vendors and their partners can support you in many ways and are keen to help you mitigate risk through their tools and services.

Ask them to assess your current infrastructure, calculate the possible savings from upgrading, develop an implementation plan and share their experience and best practices. Increasingly, you can even manage your old backup estate from your new tools, so that you can migrate when the old infrastructure has reached end-of-life while gaining experience with your new backup product.

Conclusion

With data growing unabated and many new backup features available to help tame data growth and reduce storage cost, ease the protection of virtualised environments, and enable your journey to the cloud, IDC believes that now is a good time to revisit your backup estate and assess the benefits of upgrading to a new version or evaluate a different technology to reap the rewards of technological progress.

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