

Share and protect - bringing your SMB's data storage and protection up to speed

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Businesses of today depend on data. It is the heart and soul of the modern enterprise and the risk of losing this data is a daily threat that can have dire consequences. The increasing pace of business, as well as a growing trend towards mobility, means that this data also needs to be shared, while it is being protected to prevent data loss.

For small and medium businesses (SMBs) particularly, the challenge of ensuring that data is stored, protected and shared on a limited budget has been problematic. However, thanks to advances in technology, there are now all-inclusive storage solutions available, developed with the needs of the SMB in mind, which make these challenges far easier and more affordable to address.

Two challenges are faced

When it comes to data storage, SMBs typically face two challenges: how to protect important data; and how to share it amongst members of the organisation both within the office environment and remotely.

Data protection is vital, as any major data loss event can have extreme consequences and can even cause a business to fail. Data-protection strategy has a single key element - ensuring that multiple copies of data exist. No one device is infallible and the potential for fire, flooding, theft and other disasters means that no single site is infallible either. Keeping multiple copies of critical data ensures that should something happen, if one copy is destroyed or becomes corrupt then the information can quickly be recovered. Offsite storage is considered sound business practice, but this is often expensive and inconvenient for SMBs as it involves someone physically having to move a copy of the data to another secure location. It also increases the time taken to recover data in the event of a loss event.

Sharing of data can be as easy as copying data onto a CD or flash drive and sharing it, but this method is slow and inefficient to say the least. Networks have made the sharing of data much easier. Network Attached Storage (NAS) devices offer a central repository of information that allows all users with permission to access the drive and the data it contains over a network. However, this does not address the growing issue of mobility and the need to be able to access data anywhere, at any time.

Cloud storage allows SMBs to store critical data offsite safely, without the inconvenience of having to make physical copies, and can enable mobile workers to access the data using an Internet connection wherever they are. However, there are some concerns about the cloud that have limited its uptake in the SMB space. The public cloud is cost-effective, but raises privacy and security issues as organisations do not know where their data is being stored, and the private cloud, while it is

secure, has typically been seen as expensive and requiring a lot of maintenance.

Affordable, cost-effective storage

The needs of the SMB when it comes to data storage are clear: affordable, cost-effective storage that enables the protection, sharing and recovery of data while supporting the fast pace of business in today's world. Storage also needs to be easy to use, because SMBs do not have large IT budgets or, necessarily, the in-house skills to maintain complex solutions, and should include the ability to create hybrid cloud storage.

Data protection is the top priority and this should be a key consideration for SMBs when looking for a storage system. Storage systems should make use of enterprise-class disk drives, which have higher data integrity and higher mean time between failures than consumer grade drives. They should also offer redundancy in the form of RAID-enabled data protection, either mirrored (RAID 1) or protected by parity (RAID 5) to protect against disk drive failures. Support for dual power supplies is also important as it reduces the number of potential points of failure. If the power supply fails, the redundant power supply will ensure that power to the storage is maintained, minimising the risk of corrupted data during power failures.

Recovery is vital

Recovery is the next critical consideration, as there is no point in creating redundant data if it cannot be recovered if needed. Fast recovery is key in getting businesses back up and running, and the fastest recovery is attained using locally available storage. However, local storage is not always available for recovery, so further redundancy should be created with a hybrid cloud approach. This is a combination of local, on-premises storage, along with the ability to store data in the cloud. Recovery should include not only file and folder recovery, but also bare metal back-up and recovery, to ensure that businesses can get back up and running in the event of disaster.

Storage should be easy to set up, easy to use and easy to maintain, because SMBs can ill afford to call out an IT consultant every time new devices need to be added. Cost is another factor, specifically the total cost of ownership. SMBs need to consider whether the initial investment includes the cost of hard drives or not, and, if so, how much storage space this includes and whether or not this is scalable, as well as whether or not the cost includes all necessary software and licences. For ease-of-use purposes, storage systems should incorporate automatic back-up and restore, both locally and to the cloud.

Storage that is based on a Microsoft platform, such as Windows Storage Server 2008 R2 Essentials, addresses all of these aspects. It offers a familiar user interface that improves ease of use and minimises the potential training costs of implementing a third-party back-up solution. Furthermore, it provides seamless integration into an existing active directory environment, saving further implementation costs.

Make sure that your solution ticks all the boxes

SMBS have limited resources and limited support, so when it comes to data storage and protection it is vital to choose an all-inclusive solution that ticks all of the boxes. Data loss can have devastating consequences, so make sure that critical information is stored on a central NAS device with built-in RAID protection as well as hybrid cloud integration. This makes data available both to in-office and mobile workers, ensures that data is backed up from individual devices to central storage, and has the added security of cloud back-up. This means that should the worst happen, critical data will always be available to get the business back up and running. The cost of storage is minimal compared to the cost of losing your data, so make sure it is protected in case of disaster.

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