

STORAGE WARS

With the wealth of options presented to businesses in regard to data storage these days, it is difficult to determine which solution is appropriate for which type of business. CNME investigates which storage solution is right for each organisation.

STORAGE ADVISOR

Industry verticals such as healthcare, education and government are bound to abide by certain regulations when it comes to data storage, and all industries must remain vigilant when it comes to protecting sensitive data. Further muddying the water has been the rapid development of cloud storage solutions. From private to public to hybrid, businesses, particularly SMEs, can become understandably confused.

In recent years, Big Data has been at the forefront of the minds of industry leaders and IT professionals. Data growth has been, without exaggeration, explosive in this region and globally. With our data coffers overflowing, the hunger for additional storage solutions has become insatiable. "Businesses now have multiple avenues to choose from, and more transactions are being completed electronically, making it easier to collect large sums of data," says Andrew Calthorpe, CEO, Condo Protego, "Companies realise that in order to maintain a competitive edge they need to understand the market, and that applying business analytics to this data can provide them that insight."

Of course, it is not only personal data creation that has led to its exponential growth. The Internet of Things has devices communicating between each other and thus, creating even more data. In addition, there is the issue of its economics aspects. Data is, as a commodity, relatively cheap, so rather than deleting it when not in use,

businesses tend to hold on to data with the thought that it may be used in the future. As a result, we now have historical data, current data as well as data that is being churned out every second of every day. It is no wonder, that when it comes to storage, finding a solution can seem overwhelming.

Enterprises in the Middle East are replacing their legacy storage solutions with more centralised and reliable infrastructures. “Storage has become a focal point for industries everywhere as the key to redefining their IT infrastructure no longer remains just with managing and recoding information, but doing so in a manner that allows for it to be shared across the relevant departments. This must be done without having to create multiple records of the same information and finally use it to drive strategic insight, routes to market and customer satisfaction,” says Habib Mahakian, Regional General Manager, Gulf & Pakistan, EMC. Currently, external disk storage holds strong as the storage solution of choice for businesses. However, cloud storage solutions are beginning to take hold in the region.

To be sure, the Middle East has been a slow adopter of cloud storage solutions, but virtualised storage uptake in the region is building momentum. “Software-defined storage is another important trend for companies looking to save on costs with regard to storage infrastructure and most storage appliance vendors have announced SDS initiatives,” says Ranjith Kaippada, Product Sales Manager, StoreIt Distribution, “OpenStack will continue to gain this year as the ‘open’ alternative to commercial products for data centres.”

On-premise storage such as SAN or NAS is hardly a thing of the past. Gregg Petersen, Regional Director for Middle East and SAARC, Veeam Software, agrees and doesn’t see an end to traditional solutions, “There is a huge move towards flash drive to help improve the performance in virtual



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Of course, each business’ storage needs will differ, depending on industry, size and amount of data. Enterprise customers will go with storage designed to maintain a wealth of data, whereas SMEs may gravitate toward more cost-effective cloud solutions. “A cost-benefit analysis will reveal the path an enterprise should take for meeting their storage demands,” advises Pravin Kumar, Product Manager, ManageEngine. “They can either go for an on-premise storage network, or outsource their data storage requirements to a third party.”

Outsourced data storage does offer a cost-effective solution to dealing with large amounts of data. Because incidental costs are spread over a number of clients, the bottom line at the end of the day can be tempting. Unintended spikes in data creation can be dealt with swiftly by a third party vendor. While outsourcing data storage may seem like an attractive solution, there are some downsides to managing data storage offsite. Security can be tricky when dealing with an outsourced solution, and communication between the business and the storage provider must be clear. “Stringent SLAs must be formulated with the storage service provider to ensure availability of services, security and desired levels of performance,” warns Sakkeer Hussain, Sales and Marketing Director, D-Link Middle East & Africa.

Indeed, data storage solutions are evolving rapidly to deal with the explosion of data hitting the IT landscape. Choosing the right storage solution



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for a business, in the end, comes down to evaluating each business' individual needs. "Data storage options must be carefully evaluated parallel to the current scenario and future needs of the business," advises Swapna Subramani, Senior Research Analyst, Systems and Infrastructure Solutions, IDC, MEA. "Enterprises should incorporate their future strategic initiatives, cloud implementations etc. to their storage options in order to create an optimal storage buffer and disaster recovery measures."

The future development of data storage will run parallel with the creation of more and more data. As such, performance will be of utmost concern. Not only will businesses need more data storage space, they will also need to access that data more quickly and efficiently. As such, flash storage is taking centre stage. Flash storage runs on electricity and requires limited cooling, which translates to immediate cost benefits for businesses. "[Flash storage] can read information one hundred times faster than traditional hard drives," says Rajesh Abraham, Director, Product Development, eHosting DataFort, "Several leading start-ups and established organizations are incorporating elements of flash technology into their storage products."

Purchasing storage systems should not be treated as simply another hardware procurement decision. Vendors are beginning to tap the SME market, which has been traditionally slow in technology acquirement. While this means that there are a number of new, innovative products on the market, it also translates into a more confusing choice for businesses. The best advice is to be aware of the company's needs, and to conduct a thorough



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evaluation prior to investing in any solution.

It is also necessary that the IT leadership within a business stay abreast of up-and-coming trends and solutions, as this is a branch of the industry that is developing very rapidly. On-site storage solutions should be easily scalable, as the data to be housed is likely to grow rapidly. Those opting for an outsourced solution should choose a vendor with a solid history, and a plan to grow with the industry and business' needs. Cloud solutions are absolutely viable options for some industry verticals. However, questions of security and scalability should be addressed early and revisited often. ■

