



Tackling the SME storage management problem

by Mark Lillycrop

Managing the flood of business-critical e-mails and messages in the organization is the biggest challenge facing the storage manager today, with both commercial and legal consequences for those who neglect the task. While most large enterprises are now addressing this issue, many smaller (SME) customers in the Windows Server environment have little understanding of the need to back up e-mails or even structured documents according to consistent company-wide policies. With its new version of Backup Exec, Veritas is tackling the needs of the SME market head-on.

Even according to the more cautious estimates, over 2 billion e-mail messages are sent each day in the USA alone, and a huge proportion of these notes disappear into oblivion, consigned immediately to the trash, stored precariously on the desktop in PST files, or forwarded on to other recipients. Companies that do back up and archive messages across the network each day often have no way of distinguishing between e-mails according to age, content, or sender/recipient, and as a result messages and their ever-larger (often duplicated) attachments are often captured in one amorphous mass, a very slow and storage-hungry process.

The backup and restore of e-mails has been an understandably popular topic for discussion of late. Quite apart from recent legal proceedings and new data protection legislation, both of which highlight the need to keep records of e-mail based discussions and agreements, e-mail is one of the few areas of storage management that is growing fast enough to excite the vendors. As a result a whole range of offerings is emerging from the big names in storage management, with a new breed of specialist e-mail archiving companies appearing alongside, offering tools that analyze the content of messages and archive them according to various pre-defined criteria.

But while the need for products of this kind is well understood within the enterprise, the potentially greater market made up of small and medium-sized (SME) companies remains frustratingly



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difficult to tap into. At the SME level, many companies are happy to use the plethora of simple backup utilities available in the Windows PC market, and resist a more formal approach. Despite the growing legal demands to account for electronic data, financial information and personal details of all kinds, many SMEs have very limited understanding of data management beyond the backup of critical files.

What's more, few vendors are well positioned to cater for this market, and for the educational process that inevitably precedes the sale. Veritas, with its recently announced Backup Exec for Windows 9.0, is better positioned than most to pursue SME sales, and its new product is designed specifically to address the issue of efficient e-mail backups.

Backup Exec

Backup Exec is Veritas' storage key storage management product for smaller organizations, complementing its enterprise-level NetBackup, and it already enjoys a substantial proportion of the Windows and NetWare Server-based backup business. Version 9.0 is a major release for Veritas, which is motivating its large multi-tiered channel network to pursue revenues estimated to be worth nearly \$20 billion over four years. The new version is claimed to offer the quickest and easiest installation available (benchmarks suggest that customers can be ready to backup within ten minutes). It also boasts the first integrated support for Windows Server 2003 and the first backup management capability from 'any Internet-connected computer'.

Backup Exec offers a growing range of separately priced database agents, including Oracle, Domino, R/3, and SQL Server, but it's the MS-Exchange mail agent that will be attracting particular attention with this release. Among the new features are single-image storage for attachments, incremental mailbox backup, and restore of individual public folders - functions that are essential for smaller companies struggling to meet new requirements for e-mail backup and archiving. Veritas is clearly confident that the combination of ease of installation/management and flexible mail backups will win it substantial new business in the months ahead.

Veritas versus CA

For some time, Backup Exec's main competitor in the Windows Server backup sector has been CA's Brightstor ARCserve



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product, which, by means of a curious numbering convention, has reached version 9 at the same time. While Veritas is claiming an advantage in terms of installation time and Exchange functionality, there can be no doubt that both vendors are targeting the potential SME customer base with equal aggression. The two vendors demonstrate quite different strengths - Veritas with its very strong reputation in storage management, and a carefully cultivated and loyal channel; CA with a much more diverse set of management products, but a very high profile in the marketplace.

Both suppliers are investing heavily in the SME sector. How rapidly they expand their existing base will depend on a number of factors, not the least of which is education. A great many Windows users at this level remain unclear about the need for a more sophisticated type of backup solution; about the difference between simple backups and more tailorable archival systems; and about their obligations to store unstructured data centrally in a way that satisfies emerging legislation. These issues need to be addressed differently in each geographical area, by resellers and distributors who are capable of getting the message across to local prospects in various vertical markets, and who are familiar with the local legal position. Veritas now offers an impressive range of eLearning products, self-tutorials, and promotional aids, but ultimately these tools are of little use unless the message reaches the customer on the ground.

Nevertheless, a huge growth in SME storage management sales is inevitable over the next few years. As medium-sized Windows users become more aware of the commercial benefits of a company-wide managed backup/restore strategy, we expect both Veritas and CA to see a substantial growth in revenues.

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