PRODUCT REVIEW

Avamar's Axion E Makes Backing Up Data A Snap

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By Vincent A. Randazzese
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The IT industry has long had a nearly insatiable appetite for storage. Removable media such as tape drives have positioned themselves as the technology to rely on when protecting critical data and are one of the best solutions for disaster recovery and restore. But just like anything else, storage technology is always evolving.

The days of simply backing up and protecting data on tape or other removable media have passed, and storage has transformed into an entire solution with a medley of components that revolve around full-management tools.

VINCENT A. RANDAZZESE
Assistant Technical Editor

Despite storage technology's facelift, solution providers still must consider many of the same previous factors when constructing backup solutions for their customers, such as cost per megabyte, speed and overall storage capacity.

One solution worth considering for cost-effectiveness and reliable performance is Avamar Technologies' Axion E backup and restore appliance. The uniqueness of the system lies in its software architecture, which reduces by 100 times the daily amount of data required to be backed up. The appliance's Snapup technology provides full backups at the speed of tape incremental backups by eliminating redundant data and breaking and storing files in small chunks.

The Axion E is a scalable, disk-based storage appliance designed for enterprise data protection and meets the need for fast, reliable backup. The Axion E is designed to handle large enterprise environments, while providing local and remote system fault tolerance. It works with Microsoft Windows, Sun Solaris, Linux and Oracle databases.

The Axion E uses hard-disk storage to deliver online access to data, while its software reduces the amount of data stored and moved over networks. The Snapup technology finds small, logical sequences in files, objects and databases and stores each logical sequence only once in a company's infrastructure. Axion software captures a point-in-time copy of a system that may be immediately restored as individual files, folders or entire file systems.

The appliance finds and eliminates redundant sequences of data, reducing the scale of secondary storage by more than a factor of 10. By working this way, the system eliminates the traditional concept of full or incremental backups, which eases backup-window requirements and can reduce bandwidth utilization in congested networks.

The Axion E features policy-based scheduling, organization and authentication through a centralized management application.

The system is a single 4U unit with 2 Tbytes of data storage. Data rates will probably peak in the order of 5 Mbps to 7 Mbps, which doesn't sound like very much, but because the amount of data is reduced by a factor of 100, the Axion E can effectively achieve backup speeds of about 1 Tbyte per hour in a normal system.

The device is IP-connected, so it plugs into Ethernet and does not require a separate network. Typical setup will run about 60 to 90 minutes. Because this is a non-tape system, users will have a lot more flexibility and a large number of benefits. However, solution providers must spend more time in the initial setup going over operational concepts and explaining the degrees of freedom the customer never had before.

The Axion E is a relatively complex system that is intended for large enterprises, particularly for midtier organizations in the $50 million to $500 million range that typically have 1 Tbyte to 2 Tbytes of data under management.

Solution providers should consider marketing the Axion E in particular to companies that have a system on-site and another, replicated system off-site. Most companies will put the box on-site to provide local backup-and-restore capabilities. Such a setup is a head-to-head replacement for the combination of backup hardware and software that the channel currently sells. The appliance can be sold in place of tape-based systems, and once it is installed, customers will have all of the basic backup capabilities and the opportunity to address a disaster-recovery scenario by having the off-site system.

According to research firm Gartner, total cost of ownership for tape-based systems often range from $60 to $80 per Gbyte per year or $60,000 to $80,000 per Tbyte per year. In contrast, the Axion E system costs about $25 to $30 per Gbyte per year. These savings are primarily achieved by the performance of Avamar's software, because by reducing the amount of data being stored, a hardware appliance can be built and operated at a lower cost.

The software also can contribute to lower costs for data backed up to remote sites by limiting the amount of bandwidth and communication needed.

Avamar looks for channel partners with experience in selling backup, restore and disaster-recovery solutions. The company offers hands-on training, joint sales calls, marketing resources and lead generation.

The price of the Axion E starts at $45,000 and up to $105,000 if two units are configured for remote disaster recovery. The product offers a maintenance warranty, which covers hardware and software, for $4,500 per year.

The Axion E and related products, such as more comprehensive NAS devices, are moving quickly into the channel as systems integrators and resellers see their high value-add and high profit opportunities. The days of storage devices plugging directly into a LAN with no management capabilities are gone. These days, the storage industry is more concerned with the backup process and whether it is being used efficiently, rather than what physical media is being used to perform the backups.

CHANNEL PROGRAM SNAPSHOTS

> AXION E BACKUP AND RESTOR APPLIANCE

COMPANY: Avamar Technologies
Irvine, Calif.
(949) 743-5100
www.avamar.com
DISTRIBUTORS: Direct from vendor
TECH RATING: ★★★★
CHANNEL RATING: ★★★

Note: Vendors can earn up to five stars for technical merit and five for their channel program. If the average of these two scores is four stars or greater, the product earns CRN *Test Center Recommended status.*