

The benefits of converged data protection platforms for mid-size businesses

Data is the cornerstone for every business

Mid-size businesses are increasingly embracing digital technology to gain a competitive advantage. However explosive data growth, coupled with a lean IT staff at most midmarket organizations have placed an immense burden on data protection and storage infrastructure requirements.

In business today, data is growing at an accelerating rate. The volume of data will reach 163 zettabytes by 2025, 163 zettabytes (ZB), a ten-fold increase over what was created in 2016, according to a recent report by analyst firm IDC.¹ The vast majority of this data is expected to be unstructured, characterized by both diversity and complexity of data types.

This rapid growth in business data frequently results in fragmented data protection environments, as businesses have the need to back-up physical and virtual, on-premises and off-premises data, all with different service level agreements (SLAs). Backup and secondary storage infrastructure often comes from multiple vendors, which significantly increases the acquisition and day-to-day management costs, and adds operational inefficiencies and complexity. The multitude of point products also creates data silos, making it difficult for businesses to manage data and systems centrally, and have a 360-Degree View of where they stand.

The mid-size organizations' conundrum

While enterprise businesses have teams of people who can focus on these data management and business continuity challenges, today's mid-size companies do not have that luxury. Even though the typical midmarket businesses may not face a data deluge at the same enormous scale as the largest ones, their business requirements for data management can be strikingly similar.

Take a look at these current trends:

- Mid-size enterprises are seeking growth by focusing on product innovation and technology enablement, but most are struggling to identify and unlock the enterprise's digital ambitions.
- Mid-size businesses depend heavily on mobile devices, cloud infrastructure, and their network to achieve their competitive advantage.
- They require a bullet-proof network that delivers top-tier user experiences (for the admin and end user) but doesn't sacrifice enterprise-grade features.
- They deal with increasing complexity in data management workflows while trying to maintain performance and manage capacity issues.
- In industries such as finance, healthcare, and public services, mid-size enterprises have to comply with stringent industry regulations and data handling requirements.
- They require a digital infrastructure that is highly secure and scalable, along with reliable backup and disaster recovery performance.

- Mid-market CIOs are shifting their focus from simply keeping technology running to contributing to—and accelerating—business growth.
- Compared to the enterprise segment, mid-size businesses have smaller IT staff budgets, fewer fulltime IT staff, and less specialized skillsets.

Here is the rub faced by these companies: today's business network must provide the reliability, features, security, and scalability typically only found in large-scale enterprise networks. Yet, at a mid-market business, all of these requirements must be deployed and maintained by a limited and potentially less experienced staff, when it comes to complex data management. According to Gartner, 40 percent of the IT teams at mid-market companies will be “versatilists” by 2021. Gartner defines this role of IT versatilist as an IT generalist, or a person in IT with sufficient skills and knowledge to support a broad array of technologies.

Digital transformation vs. growing pains

Like their peers in large enterprises, mid-size businesses need the insights, tools, and resources to react quickly and the confidence to do things differently. This is exactly why they need solutions which can help them navigate the complexities of data management, protection, recovery, and cloud services.

Mid-market companies are evolving, in terms of expansion, new initiatives, and spending. With more businesses launching digital transformation initiatives, the segment (as described by Deloitte³) is experiencing “new levels of technology disruption.” The move to digital business in many different vertical industries is unlocking growth—and more spending—along with new efficiencies in thousands of U.S. midmarket companies.

According to recent research from the U.S. Middle Market Business Index, 69 percent of mid-market businesses expect revenues to increase in the next six months³. Approximately 58 percent anticipate a boost in worker productivity. And with the move to digital technologies, 55 percent expect a reduction in operational costs.⁴

Couple those growth trends with the challenges of digital transformation, and you can get a clearer picture of the growing pains that lie ahead in the mid-market segment. Most likely, they don't have the funds to hire full-time employees assigned to data protection, storage, security, and data management. Storage management alone has become a specialized niche for IT staffers who are tasked with maintaining an organization's entire IT assets, often diverting time to unnecessary tasks while delaying business-facing organizational goals.

Mid-size companies have two choices: reach out to enlist knowledgeable data protection and storage vendors who can help them succeed with business continuity solutions, or run the risk of dealing with data management complexity themselves. The latter choice can be a silent killer of business growth, and can also increase their risk of data loss.

The need for a scalable data infrastructure

The growth of virtualized applications, diminishing backup windows, and explosive data growth have collectively placed an immense burden on data protection and storage infrastructure requirements. IT organizations are looking for ways to deploy and manage data protection infrastructures at scale, reduce complexity with streamlined workflows, and improve cost of ownership by eliminating silos in data protection and storage. Additionally, IT teams are constantly challenged to balance capacity planning and storage costs, which often leads them to do forklift infrastructure upgrades as they struggle to adapt to dynamic requirements.

The benefits of converged scale-out data protection solution

In recent years, a disruptive technology has emerged, creating a brand-new category of backup and recovery and storage solutions: converged data protection appliances.

The concept is very simple: combine the backup and recovery software with a scale-out storage appliance that can be used as a backup target and to accommodate most storage requirements.

Converged data platforms eliminate storage and data protection silos, blur the lines between primary and secondary storage and scale-out seamlessly to help manage explosive data growth. They deliver much-needed relief to the vast number of mid-sized and fast-growth organizations struggling with data management, data protection, and the risk of downtime.

Already, there are a handful of vendors that pioneer the converged data protection space and they mainly serve the enterprise market. Here, the total cost of ownership is in line with the companies they address: very high.

Mid-size organizations are drowning in data while their legacy infrastructures are crumbling. Until now, their alternative was to buy limited, secondary storage only data platforms. Those are priced for large enterprises from few incumbents vendors and all too often left them with complexity and high cost of ownership. Ironically, this is exactly what IT versatilists in mid-enterprise companies need to avoid.

It is very important for mid-market businesses to select a converged solution that integrates both scale-out storage and data protection for physical and virtual environments. This solution is delivered in a single, integrated and easy-to-use platform, with seamless integration to a cloud Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS). As a result, mid-enterprise organizations can benefit from a complete solution to solve the data protection challenges by integrating scalable, “pay as you grow” primary, secondary and cloud data-management capabilities. Even better: the solution comes at a price that won’t break the bank. There are also a few vendors who support Bring Your Own Drive (BYOD), allowing customers to mix and match different types, speeds and capacities of retail-priced disk drives, driving costs down by a factor of 10.

Making the right choice

When selecting a converged data protection platform, IT professionals from mid-size organizations must ensure the following features are provided:

1. Eliminate operational complexity

The converged appliance must be able to consolidate the components for managing storage, local backups, onsite and offsite replication, DRaaS, and their corresponding retention schedules all in a single place. Simple data storage, recovery management, and optimized simple workflows are key attributes to look out for.

2. Enable powerful data protection

The converged platform must deliver industry-leading recovery time objectives (RTOs) and recovery point objectives (RPOs) for premium data integrity and business continuity. It should also offer a “set and forget” SLA-based, policy-driven protection and management. This gives the assurance that every machine is recoverable according to a specific backup, retention, and replication SLA.

3. Scale-out storage on the go

The converged appliance needs to provide a pool of scalable capacity for either primary or secondary workloads to eliminate costs associated with over-provisioning and disruptive forklift upgrades with its ability to expand storage dynamically and scale granularly –add one drive at a time, or multiple nodes within a cluster – all without any configuration changes to the application.

4. Total business continuity (with DRaaS)

The cloud element with converged data protection platforms is also very important in the race to “zero downtime.” It can be used as another tier of storage, offering near limitless object storage capacity. Further, the cloud can be a replication location, providing an off-site backup. It can also be a recovery location, allowing disaster recovery to the cloud and testing in the cloud using a copy of the on-premises production environment.

The converged solution should offer tight integration with the vendor cloud services (and third parties) to make recovery of the entire infrastructure quick and seamless, while offering the highest SLAs with one throat to choke.

“We chose StorageCraft OneXafe to solve our data storage and management challenges because of its superior functionality, outperforming Unitrends or Infracore. In addition, it offered nearly twice the available storage compared to Veeam and Exagrid—at much better economics. OneXafe is incredibly easy to use and the technical support has been stellar. As a systems administrator who’s running hard and fast with few resources, this really matters.”

- Don Remy, Systems Administrator,
Nebo School District

Conclusion

Growing data volume, rising cost of downtime and data loss, limited storage capacity, business continuity, and inadequate backup and recovery performance are amongst the myriad of challenges that IT teams face today. Increasing complexity in data management workflows has further compounded these performance and capacity issues. This complexity continues to be exacerbated by today's fragmented data protection environments and the need to backup physical and virtual data, on-premises and off premises data, all with different service level agreements (SLAs).

Converged data protection platforms are the answer and can help mid-size businesses. They remove the need for siloed solutions, minimize costs incurred from standalone hardware and software solutions, and eliminate redundancy in management. Mid-enterprise organizations need to be vigilant when making their choice and must be looking for solutions that will deliver primary and secondary storage with integrated data protection in a single converged solution.

StorageCraft: the right partner for the mid-size businesses

StorageCraft's powerful data protection offerings deliver instant, reliable and complete data recovery and eliminate downtime. Our innovative converged primary and secondary scale-out storage platform, with integrated data protection, solves data growth challenges, is efficient and easy to use for on-premises, cloud-based or hybrid deployments.

OneXafe converged scalable data protection platform

OneXafe is a converged data platform that unifies enterprise-class data protection with scale-out storage in an easy-to-use, configurable solution. For mid-size organizations who are looking to protect and manage data in heterogeneous environments, OneXafe eliminates complexity and provides flexible deployment to accommodate various workload requirements. At the same time, it significantly reduces costs associated with primary and secondary storage as well as data protection software.

ShadowXafe data protection

ShadowXafe is simple to deploy, easy to manage and reliable even under the most demanding circumstances. It ensures SLA-driven data protection and delivers powerful recovery for physical and virtual machines (VMs). Tightly integrated with StorageCraft cloud-based DRaaS, ShadowXafe provides total business continuity and orchestrated recovery with a single click. In the event of system failure, data corruption or natural disaster, organisations can perform VM recovery in milliseconds and restore their entire infrastructure in minutes using StorageCraft's patented VirtualBoot technology.

StorageCraft Cloud services (DraaS) protect on-premises business systems and data in a cloud purpose-built for total business continuity, while **StorageCraft Cloud Backup** provides granular protection of your business's Microsoft Office 365 data and G Suite by Google Cloud data.

“The data protection and recovery software market is expected to continue strong growth through 2021. As businesses suffer the damage inflicted by downtime, they will increasingly embark on ‘the new race to zero’—near zero RPO and RTO. StorageCraft's OneXafe aims to shift the paradigm of traditional data protection by converging data platforms for primary and secondary storage while integrating data protection. It is a development worth watching closely.”

- Phil Goodwin,
Research Director, IDC

¹ Data Age 2025: The Evolution of Data to Life-Critical Don't Focus on Big Data; Focus on the Data That's Big, 2017 IDC sponsored by Seagate, www.seagate.com/www-content/our-story/trends/files/Seagate-WP-DataAge2025-March-2017.pdf

² By 2021, 40% of IT will be versatilists, holding multiple roles, most of which will be business, rather than technology-related. (<https://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/3811367>)

³ "Technology disruption in the midmarket," Deloitte, August 2018 <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/deloitte-private/us-private-tech-report-2018.pdf>

⁴ US Middle Market Business Index," RSM in partnership with the US Chamber of Commerce" Q2 2018 https://rsmus.com/content/dam/mcgladrey/pdf_download/mmbi_q2_2018_secured.pdf

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