

The Evolution of Data Availability

Why do so many businesses rely on old-school technology for data management?



In today's business climate, we like to think of the adoption of new technology as a steady forward march. While some businesses may take longer than others to take to the cloud or integrate machine learning, for instance, we still assume that ultimately we'll all arrive at the same destination.

In reality, that doesn't always happen. In the realm of data management, says Dave Russell, vice president of enterprise strategy at Veeam, around 57 percent of organizations still rely on decades-old tape-based systems for backup purposes. Even as the technology governing and protecting enterprise data grows ever more sophisticated, some legacy systems have a way of sticking around. And once they're ready to make a change, no two companies will adopt the latest and greatest innovations in quite the same way.

"Businesses can take a variety of different approaches," Russell says. "The important thing is to do it with your eyes wide open and make sure you're implementing something that's going to meet the needs of the business today and is extensible enough to meet the needs in the future. With tape-based backup, sometimes that's the only tool at an organization's disposal—and in some cases it works well. Other times, it might be worth making a change."

BEYOND THE BACKUP

Tape-based approaches aren't inherently dated, Russell argues. But cost remains a significant factor of their longevity. Organizations that have made heavy investments in what was once state-of-the-art technology are often hesitant to shut it down before they absolutely have to, especially when that technology is still working. And when it's well-maintained and properly implemented, tape can still provide a strong skeleton for a company's backup infrastructure.

But it's this word—"backup"—that's the root of the issue. The technology of data availability's evolution beyond tape has drawn on everything from the cloud and predictive analytics to automation, and the result has been to expand the definition of "availability" to include much more than backup alone. Now,

availability is a multistage process that begins with backup, but positions businesses to not only preserve its data, but also act on it.

"Yes, it's backup. Yes, it's replication. But it's also more than that," Russell says. "Because of the ability to get fast access to backup data, we can stand up copies of your data and allow you to do reporting, analytics or security patch testing. That's especially crucial with the proliferation of cyber threats. We're going to have to apply more intelligence. We're going to have to offer greater orchestration and automation."

FLIPPING THE SCRIPT

Russell also points toward innovative tools like Veeam DataLabs, which requires a direct-access device, like a virtual machine in the cloud, and can't be utilized on a sequential medium like tape. A central component of the Veeam Hyper-Availability Platform, DataLabs essentially flips the script on data management: Rather than working as a reactive insurance policy, it's instead a proactive method of capturing and unlocking the value of the data itself.

"We can bring a greater intelligence to the enterprise," Russell says. "With predictive analytics, intelligent diagnostics, the ability to apply policy and better leverage your data through Veeam DataLabs, IT administrators actually have a fighting chance of keeping up with the unprecedented growth and sprawl of data."

But for the countless organizations still relying on a tape-based approach, it's possible to evolve by increments—perhaps even keeping their current technology in place, but augmenting it with disk or flash-based systems of availability. By doing so, processes that once took 24 hours could be reduced to a matter of minutes.

"There's generally not a single absolute truth that fits every organization. So when businesses design an availability strategy, they'll often try to determine the right mix of all these different kinds of technologies and processes," Russell says. "That's where the power of Veeam comes into play. We can work with a variety of applications and hardware, and we don't tell somebody, 'Oh, tape is bad and cloud is best.' Because there really isn't a 'bad' or a 'best.'"