

Helping Your Customer Choose the Right Data Storage and Protection Solution

As small to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) continue to struggle with exponential data growth and how best to simplify and speed up both data backup and recovery, they have begun to rely more than ever on knowledgeable resellers who can help direct them toward the right solution.

Ideally, SMBs are looking for solutions that will not only meet their needs for data storage, backup, restore and archiving, but also those that will minimize their ongoing costs. Finding the right fit can be a tall order for organizations that must navigate through an increasingly crowded maze of solutions, which offer everything from a dizzying selection of technologies and appliances to dozens of cloud-based services.

How can SMBs successfully sift through the options in order to find the perfect fit? Reviewing some facts, along with common needs, is one way to cut down the noise in the market.

This article will help SMBs (and their trusted advisors) focus on what matters most, specifically regarding their data storage and data protection requirements.

TOP SMB NEEDS (AND WHAT'S DRIVING THEM)

Based on market trends, input from market leaders and many of our own customers, here are some challenges for SMBs in 2012. They represent a burgeoning set of opportunities for today's channel resellers:

1. SMBs will create much more data over the next year than they have today.

It's not uncommon to see an SMB grow his/her data sets by 200% or more in one year (one customer even reported 800% growth). This is not surprising, given the SMB's growing reliance on e-mail, shared files, critical application data, and the need to digitize/store prior "paper" records or documents, not to mention the increasing use of large video and image files, which are all readily available via the internet.

Now, add mountains of governmental compliance rules and regulations to this mix, and most SMBs find that they face a significant and growing data storage challenge. Not only do SMBs need to store and protect their increasing amounts of data for everyday use, but they must also retain and archive it—in the right way, for the right amount of time—in order to be compliant with the latest regulations. The fact is that most SMBs are unaware or unconcerned about these challenges—and may not even be cognizant of just how exposed they are to the risks associated with inadequate data security practices. The bottom line is that they need and prefer to focus on running their businesses, and the majority of organizations would prefer to subcontract out the task of keeping their IT infrastructure operational and their information legally compliant. That's where a well-informed technology partner can help.

Helping Your Customer Choose the Right Data Storage and Protection Solution

2. SMBs will continue to struggle with how best to manage, store, protect and rapidly retrieve their growing data repositories.

Surveys often report SMB frustration with the cost and complexity of data protection and storage. They want low-cost, flexible options for backup, storage and archiving that also deliver fast retrieval of their data, when needed. According to recent industry surveys, over 80% of small and medium-sized businesses want to accelerate backup/restore times and keep a copy of their backup data at a remote site.

3. SMBs will continue to have limited IT staff and constrained IT spending budgets.

The world economy continues to put enormous pressure on small businesses to accomplish more with less. SMBs will continue to wrestle with budget constraints while managing an ever-expanding amount of digital data. These SMBs will invest in solutions that can help them better manage and preserve their data and provide a solid return on investment.

4. Many SMBs will continue to neglect comprehensive data protection strategies for their critical data (even though they know better).

Let's face it; most SMBs are extremely busy and the person managing the organization's data is often wearing more than one hat at the same time. Important things—like updating their backup processes to ensure they are continuously covered—can still take a back seat in their priorities. This issue continues to be an SMB challenge, despite what many have already heard about the dire consequences that can befall an SMB when disaster strikes. It is a fact that many SMBs never recover financially from serious data loss.

5. SMBs will continue to look for affordable, turn-key solutions that they can “set-and-forget,” especially when it comes to data protection and disaster recovery.

There's a lot of flash and sizzle in the market today. New technologies, along with innovations in legacy processes, play a part here. Still, it pays to keep the basics in mind when looking for a data protection strategy. Most SMBs need simplicity, affordability and a turn-key solution that doesn't require an IT specialist to deploy and run.

How well any solution meets the above needs is one way that resellers can develop a short list of options to solve their SMB customer's data storage challenges. By delving a little deeper into SMB prerequisites, resellers can sort through the options and point their customers in the right data storage direction.

THE KEY PILLARS OF DATA PROTECTION FOR SMBs

Many SMBs want to reduce (and simplify) the overall number of data protection approaches they have in place. This is the point that SMBs also recognize they need to start making some changes to improve their outcomes.

To help SMBs sort through the confusing array of data protection options on the market, it can be helpful to think of data protection as having a few key pillars: backup, archiving and off-site storage. We'll cover each of these pillars briefly below:

- **Backup.** When SMBs consider their backup needs, it usually translates into this: Having a second copy of their “critical” data. Backup is used for short-term data recovery. Backup success often means having easy access (for quick restore) of data and files that have been previously copied, typically with local disk or tape storage that effectively combines reliability and portability at a reasonable cost.
- **Archiving.** Archiving falls under the category of long-term storage. SMBs need to look for hardware/software combinations that allow them to easily and affordably retain their data for long periods. Archived files can be kept for decades. Keeping more than one copy is essential to properly safeguard data. Tape is typically used for archiving because of its affordability, archival life (30 years), reliability and portability.

Helping Your Customer Choose the Right Data Storage and Protection Solution

- **Off-site storage.** This third pillar of data protection moves toward the vital component of disaster recovery. To keep their data safe, SMBs need to be able to move a copy of their data to a different location that's wholly removed from their primary site of business. A popular method for affordable archival or off-site storage is the use of removable disk or tape media that incorporates innovative new technologies and offers a range of capacity, scale and automation.

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

Another way to add value for your SMB customers is to separate the good from the not-so-good solutions in this crowded market. Help them look not just at what is desired, but also at what should be avoided. When talk turns to data protection and SMB storage, many analysts warn of some common pitfalls associated with certain small business tools, technologies and services in this area.

Numerous offerings look great on the surface, but remain weak in the following key areas:

- **Capacity**—Many solutions still don't let SMBs affordably store enough data
- **Scalability**—They don't scale well as SMB data sets grow
- **Speed**—They don't perform fast enough for either backup or restores
- **Quality**—They appear to offer the required functionality but do not have the indispensable reliability and durability to protect mission-critical data

Small businesses will look to you, as their advocate, for reassurance that the solution is successful in the ways that matter. They'll also want to know that it has successfully survived not just your own scrutiny, but the scrutiny and experience of other customers and independent industry reviewers.

While some SMBs might yearn for a high-end sophisticated data protection system, most SMBs have neither the time nor the capital to invest in something beyond a simple, affordable and reliable solution that is robust in the above areas.

As you calculate an SMB's future data growth costs, be sure to project extra hardware expenses, software licenses or, in the case of cloud services, the added per-gigabyte costs to store their larger, future data sets somewhere "in the cloud." When you do, you may find the emerging price tag may be too steep for most SMBs to bear. For example, many cloud backup services look like a low, up-front cost, but tend to mushroom as the SMB's protected data sets grow exponentially beyond a certain base size. Equally, SMBs may prefer not to entrust their valuable and confidential data to service providers who might be located in other regions and whose own systems might be at risk for various reasons, including environmental or climatic conditions, as was the case with one large cloud provider's recent inaccessibility in the U.S.

You can add value to the discussion when you alert your customers to any flaws in their current data storage strategies. For instance, some SMBs have opted to use consumer-grade external USB hard drives to back up their data. They will appreciate your help when you steer them away from products that are less reliable and more vulnerable to data loss than purpose-built, business-grade solutions that are designed to withstand tested and certified levels of accidental trauma.

Helping Your Customer Choose the Right Data Storage and Protection Solution

SIMPLICITY IN A WORLD OF GROWING COMPLEXITY

Sometimes, the best answer to a customer's data protection needs may prove to be the easiest answer for the reseller as well. Look for synergies here between your needs as a reseller and that of your SMB customer. You should find more alike than different. You both are undoubtedly looking for the same things, such as:

- A solution that has a low cost of entry
- A solution that allows for flexibility to grow with the business requirements
- A solution that is quick to grasp and requires little to no training
- A solution that offers easy management
- A solution with standards that are established
- A solution that covers the basics: easy purchase, easy deployment, ease of management and ease of support
- A solution that is built for business with the highest quality

Complexity, numerous features and steep price tags are easy to find in this space. But, resellers can cut through the noise and realize the right mix of affordability, robustness and simplicity. You just need to know what to look for and the technology vendors with whom to partner.

It's our hope that these insights will bring you closer to realizing your own goals in the SMB market. They should provide you with a useful, working framework from which to view both SMB needs and any potential solutions you evaluate on behalf of your clients.

About Tandberg Data

Tandberg Data is a leading global supplier of data protection solutions for small and medium-sized businesses. The company's wide range of cost-effective storage products and services provides customers with best-in-class tape, disk, removable disk and software solutions for backup, archiving and disaster recovery. These solutions are marketed through a global channel of qualified resellers, distributors and major server OEMs. An extensive service and support network supports all Tandberg Data products worldwide.

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