6 Surprising Reasons Why You *Should* Be Selling Tape Storage

There are plenty of tape naysayers that would tell you tape is a dying media. The facts, however, tell a completely different story.

By Chris Marsh, market development manager, Spectra Logic

What are some of the primary reasons tape storage gets such a bad rap?

The overwhelming answer to this is perception, or rather misperception, about modern tape technology. The idea that tape is *old* is as true and untrue as saying disk is *old*; both technologies have been around for decades. Modern tape is actually more reliable than modern hard drives — often by two orders of magnitude when comparing BER (bit error rate).

The other perception that is common is that tape is hard to use. Unfortunately, this is more of a commentary on how data management software handles tape than it is a commentary directly on tape. There is a physical aspect to tape that will never disappear, thus the image of a tape unraveled can always be used against the tape market. In reality, it remains the most reliable, cost-effective, portable media platform on the market.

Chris Marsh

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What are some of the advantages of tape storage over other storage media?

1. Long-term retention and storage — tape is designed to have a 30-year lifespan when used for archival purposes and properly stored.

2. Reliability — Tape maintains a better error-rate over hard drives and other technologies ranging from 10 to 1,000 times more reliable.

3. Portability — Tape remains one of the few stable portable media platforms. As data sets grow into the Petabyte range, there are times where it is significantly faster and less expensive to ship a palate of tape media rather than purchase enough network bandwidth to upload large amounts of data.

4. Cost — Tape is 6 to 10 times less expensive than other media, and it's exponentially less expensive in power and cooling costs.

5. Streaming speeds — Tape drives continue to be able to stream data faster than other technologies and are hindered only by network speeds when streaming serial data. In partnership with FileTek, we've seen retrieval speeds of over 1 GB/s of throughput of data from tape libraries with concurrent drives streaming data.

6. Present and future cartridge capacity — with IBM and FujiFilm's BaFe tape exceeding 35TB in a proof of concept, and current capacities ranging from 1.5TB to 5TB per tape, tape continues to hold the lead for total capacity per cartridge.

What are some of the best opportunities for storage VARs to sell tape storage solutions?

Companies with large amounts of data, particularly cloud vendors, as well as large enterprise, media and entertainment, high performance computing, and other data-intensive verticals. Tape is still used by more than 70% of end users by most customers. With 90% of data on servers not being accessed in a 90-day window, it doesn't make sense to keep that data on higher-cost, energy-inefficient storage platforms when the tape can be architected to be online and available for even primary storage use. The biggest thing for any reseller to remember is that if they aren't selling tape to their customers, someone else will, and they are missing out on both the initial and incremental revenue that comes with selling tape.

Can you offer any examples that illustrate how tape proved to be superior over another type of storage technology?

As with most large businesses, cloud vendors are not keen on opening up their data centers for public display or commentary. There is a very simple anecdote about tape storage and the cloud that doesn't even require using any single vendor's name. If you look at the major cloud issues/failures over the past few years, when tape was involved, data was not lost. When tape wasn't involved, customers lost data and in a few cases, went out of business.

Beyond the data protection piece however, is the cost model of the cloud. Tape allows for a much lower overall cost and annual cost of storing data. Since latency is already a factor in cloud storage, millisecond recall speeds aren't realistic. Tape can perform at very acceptable availability speeds, ranging from three seconds to an average of 60 to 90 seconds. For large file transfers, this is not a significant buffer to add. Tape should be the dominant media for large files and inert data, utilizing disk and flash for very small files, and frequently accessed or transactional data. Tape and disk should be used in tandem to complement each other's strengths in the cloud to provide your customers with the benefits of both technologies. ●