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[Tech Trends]

When Mac and PC Get Along

SMBs take advantage of tools that simplify backing up Macs and PCs over a single network.

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Photo: Wesley Hitt

Joseph Dempsey says his film group runs BakBone's NetVault to back up its Macs and PCs.

Backing up Macs and PCs over a single network is a big deal for Dempsey Film Group of Little Rock, Ark.

As a full-service production house that creates high-profile commercials, original programming for television, interactive video kiosks and corporate videos, customers demand top-notch work and expect access to what they've paid for, whenever they need it.

"When a client we have worked with for 30 years asks for a copy of something, we need to make sure that it's accessible and in good shape," says Joseph Dempsey, director of operations at the company, which has about 30 employees.

Until recently, Dempsey and his team weren't so confident in their ability to deliver. The company runs both Mac and Windows-based machines — the Macs for creative work and the Windows machines for back-office tasks. But backup was sporadic on the Macs and nonexistent on PCs. Mac users backed up systems independently on DVDs and external hard drives, and Windows machines were hardly ever backed up.

The lack of adequate backup coupled with a move to tapeless digital video cameras prompted the company to change its approach. Before the company went digital, project files were small and easy to back up and the video footage was on removable tapes. But tapeless cameras created a wealth of data that Dempsey needed to store digitally. So when they made the shift, the company decided it was a good time to deploy a more comprehensive backup strategy.

Dempsey Film Group chose BakBone's NetVault: Backup, which backs up both Windows and Macs over a single system. When the deployment is complete, Dempsey's Windows-based data will be backed up to spinning disks for near-term storage and then moved to a tape system from Tandberg Data. Through the same system, the Mac-based data will be transferred from the camera into a reader for duplication. It will then be copied to a spinning disk for near-term storage and then ultimately backed up to tape.

"With this method, we know everything will be backed up properly, and we think it will give us a better migration path to keep data accessible as formats change," Dempsey says.

Dempsey Film Group is doing what more SMBs with Mac and Windows machines are doing — deploying software that consolidates backup through one system.

For several years, many companies facing this predicament created separate backup plans, one for each operating system. But as Macs become more commonplace in the small business environment, backup manufacturers have developed software that can back up both Mac and Windows machines together, saving companies time and money.

"Software that backed up both PCs and Macs wasn't as common five years ago," says Deni Connor, principal analyst of market research firm Storage Strategies NOW of Austin, Texas.

"As more small businesses realize that Macs are good for more than just graphics, and as Apple has introduced viable hardware for small businesses and retooled its operating system to work well for servers, Mac use has really begun to take off in small businesses," she says.

More Compatible

That shift prompted many backup manufacturers to introduce Mac/Windows interoperability into their products. And companies quickly realized that consolidating backup through one system creates the kind of centralized administration that leads to lower cost, less troubleshooting and more comprehensive backup in general.

Most consolidated backup products work by transferring selected files from all Apple and Windows desktops, notebooks and servers to the backup target, which can be any tape or disk storage system from companies such as EMC, Hewlett-Packard, Nexsan Technologies or Spectra Logic.

Most Mac/Windows backup software products consist of two parts: a base package and a separate Mac agent. CommVault requires the base package of Simpana (formerly Galaxy) and an iDataAgent for Apple Mac OS X; while other products, including EMC Retrospect, Atempo Time Navigator and CA BrightStor ARCserve Backup, also require both the base package and a separate Mac agent.

BakBone's NetVault: Backup is configured somewhat differently, offering one integrated package that handles four operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux and Solaris.

Whichever approach companies take, all products achieve the ultimate goal: automated, comprehensive, timely consolidated backups, regardless of operating platform.

Old Friends?

While systems that back up Macs and PCs are more prevalent today, they actually have been around for several years. Andrew Kagan of Enigmedia in New York City started backing up Macs and Windows machines in 2000 when EMC Retrospsect added Windows backup to its bag of tricks.

BizTech Quick Poll

Does your company plan to back up its Mac and Windows machines over a single system?

16% We have such a system.
49% We do not have a mix of Mac and Windows machines.
4% Don't know.
3% We plan to deploy within one year.
1% We plan to deploy within six months.
27% We have no plans to do this.

Source: 577 BizTech *readers*

Kagan, president of the e-commerce development company, says before Retrospect moved to PCs, there was no way for it to back up the Windows OS. "We were backing up the Macs with Retrospect Server to a Sony AIT-1 tape drive, backing up the Windows PCs locally with desktop backup software to individual external drives and backing up our Windows servers with a separate Exabyte DAT tape drive and CA ARCserve Backup for Windows," he explains.

With no centralized means of monitoring what was being backed up, the company could not manage its growing store of data or know when a computer was in a vulnerable state. Today, it is using EMC Retrospect to back up all of its Windows and Mac systems.

"By consolidating into a single [system], we are dealing with one storage array, one tape library, one backup app and one data set management process," he says. "If someone can't find a file or a desktop crashes, we have a straightforward and simple recovery process."

Jason Ferenczy-Zumpano wants a similar system for his company. Having come from another job where he used EMC Retrospect to back up a Mac-based enterprise, he was anxious to use it at his new company, Cornerstone Medical Care.

With 35 employees and three branches in Brandon and Sun City Center, Fla., the company operates many systems. Although most data is on Windows PCs, there are a few Macs — one to house a legacy app that doesn't run on Windows and others for patients waiting for appointments. Today, Ferenczy-Zumpano uses the system to back up Macs and PCs.

AJA Video Systems, a Grass Valley, Calif., manufacturer of digital-video products, moved to a consolidated backup system because its existing Windows-based system failed to back up consistently.

"We had repeated failures on the Windows site — backups wouldn't come through properly or it would miss backups altogether," explains Bren Smith, AJA Video's head of IT.

Smith wanted to back up everything through one system. Now that EMC Retrospect is up and running, "it's all transparent and easy to manage," he says.Scalability was also an issue: Two years ago the company had about 65 employees; today it has about 100 and is poised for continued growth.

"As we grow, we'll have more Macs, and we need to keep everything consistent and reliable," Smith says.

Although backup consolidation today is feature-rich and affordable, more improvements are on the way, Storage Strategies' Connor believes. The analyst says that eventually most of these products will also offer continuous data protection, which Atempo's Time Navigator includes today.

"With CDP, every change is backed up, so if you experience a power outage or pick up spyware, you can roll back to the last good point in time before that occurred," Connor concludes.

CEO Takeaway

Here's a short take on the primary benefits of consolidated backup:

• Reduces the amount of backup technology and software, lowering costs and complexity.

• Forces companies to create a comprehensive backup strategy, which they might not otherwise do.

• Offers advanced features the company may not have had previously, such as the ability to restore systems quickly and perform staged backups and snapshot transfers.

• Promises a return on investment of generally less than two years — although avoiding a catastrophic data loss is priceless.

To read more on the latest features in backup software, click here.

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