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The Benefits of Storage as a Service

The benefits of storage as a service are numerous, but STaaS isn't always what people think.

[Karen D. Schwartz](#) | Apr 23, 2019



Many organizations are investigating the benefits of [storage](#) as a service. Why? The better question might be why not?

Increasing demands for performance, scalability and agility have never been

Infrastructure, compute and networking resources, they also impact storage. In many cases, the way organizations have purchased, managed and scaled storage just isn't working for them anymore—at least when it comes to meeting demanding service level agreements (SLAs) for performance, scalability and agility.

There are many reasons why existing storage can cause problems. Lack of enough database storage, for example, can adversely impact application performance. Fast-growing applications may need more storage than expected or immediate storage resources. Organizations may be struggling with ways to ensure that their storage environments comply with specific regulations like [GDPR](#), HIPAA or SOC-2.

Any or all of these reasons may prompt organizations to consider what experts say is a fast-growing storage structure: storage as a service (STaaS). Like other “as a service” models, STaaS allows organizations to pay for only the storage they use (usually on a flat \$/GB/month basis), making it an OpEx model instead of the traditional CapEx model most companies have used in the past.

With this model, storage providers are responsible for storing their customers' data. Customers can access that data on demand using software provided by the [storage](#) vendor. Most STaaS offerings include support for block, file and object storage. And because STaaS vendors agree to meet SLAs, companies can be confident that the storage will be able to scale and perform as needed.

Because of its name, many people assume that STaaS is a purely cloud-based service model. While cloud is an important part of STaaS, many vendors also offer the option to store data on their own premises. With an on-premise deployment, businesses can choose their own storage equipment but pay only for what they use. Like a cloud-based model, vendors still agree to the customer's SLA requirements. [Pure Storage](#), for example, offers its Evergreen Storage Service (ES2) this way. With this model, Pure owns the equipment, which is installed and managed by Pure partners.

offerings provide storage both in the cloud and on premises, including those from IBM, DXC, Zadara and Pure.

While it's typical to start with the on-premise model, the hybrid model eventually will become the de facto choice, said John Webster, a senior partner at Evaluator Group.

“Companies will anchor themselves on premise because they think of it as a more supported environment, and they don't have to worry about their data crossing the firewall,” he said. “But, over time, we'll see more going for the hybrid type, especially medium and larger enterprises.”

Two Options

When it comes to STaaS, companies have two basic options: They can manage the storage as a service themselves, or they can hire a company to provide it as a fully managed service. With the first method, the vendor will install the storage infrastructure and provide support, while IT professionals within the company are responsible for the day-to-day running of the storage. With the second option, the company simply hires the vendor or a managed services provider and gives them the [SLA](#). From that point, the provider runs everything.

The decision of which method to choose depends on many things, including the depth of a company's IT bench and appetite for loss of control. One factor Evaluator Group brings up: Storage vendors usually offer their own platforms only on an as-a-service basis, while managed storage services providers can offer customers a choice of vendors and platforms. That's important when it comes to things like compatibility with an existing environment, data protection, compliance and management practices, Webster said.

However, it's not necessarily about money; while the managed services option may

“With a capital acquisition, you are paying for the environment up front, while with STaaS, the first check you write is for the first month and just for the capacity you use for that month,” he explained. “Over time you’ll probably keep adding capacity, have to maintain and upgrade, and renew software licenses in the capital acquisition model. The OpEx model is always cheaper on a cumulative cost basis. The more people start to understand that, the more you will see a shift.”

A Slam-Dunk?

Storage has become such a utility for most businesses that moving to a STaaS model seems like a good idea. But there are times when it’s not a great idea, at least at this point. In some cases, companies don’t like the idea of giving up control, although different vendors give users different amounts of control. In other cases, the difference might be whether the vendor will allow a company to integrate other tools and applications with its storage solution.

If you don’t need that flexibility and you have people who can manage it, you can save money and keep your existing assets for longer,” said Jason Nadeau, vice president of portfolio marketing for Pure Storage. “If you’re an organization that optimizes for cost instead of agility, it may not be the right choice today.”

If you are considering STaaS, make sure you look for a solution that aligns well with your consumption, Webster said. He also advises shopping around for a vendor that will agree to a short-term commitment. This will allow the company time to try out the model.

And negotiate your SLA, Nadeau said. “Even if you bring in a managed service, you still have control from the standpoint of the SLAs around performance and availability.”

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