

EC TRENDS

NETWORKED STORAGE & THE INDIAN SMB

About a decade after the enterprise segment began to move away from DAS to networked storage, the same saga is repeating itself in the Indian SMB segment with some unique twists.

By Prashant L Rao

Back at the turn of the century, the storage infrastructure in the Indian enterprise didn't exist. It was basically seen as part of the server infrastructure with companies buying storage along with the server in the form of Direct Attached Storage (DAS). Over time, networked storage made inroads into the enterprise and today there is no large company that relies on DAS—they are all on NAS or SAN.

In the SMB segment, it's been mostly server-attached storage but that is starting to change. Segments like BFSI are exploring NAS as an option to replace a PC server at the branch. Organizations in BFSI are also looking at deploying networked storage at the core of their infrastructure using it exactly as their bigger counterparts did for consolidating from server-attached storage to NAS or SAN. It's clearly time for a change



SURVEILLANCE IS BECOMING A BIG AREA AND WE ARE HITTING THE ANALOG DVR MARKET WITH COMPETITIVELY PRICED BUNDLES

PRAVEEN SAHAI,
DIRECTOR OF SALES, INDIA & SAARC,
FOR IOMEGA, AN EMC COMPANY



WHEN IT COMES TO STORAGE, THE FINANCE SECTOR IS THE BIGGEST PLAY FOR US. EDUCATION, RETAIL AND HOSPITALITY ARE OTHER VERTICALS WHERE WE ARE FINDING TRACTION

SUBHASHINI PRABHAKAR,
CTO, DAX NETWORKS

driven by unprecedented price points in the small business and the substantial functionality that allows a NAS box to stand in for a PC server and then some in a bank branch without needing a dedicated IT administrator to babysit the box.

Unlike in the enterprise segment where the transition to NAS and SAN came about purely from the desire to consolidate storage at a central location and thereby improve utilization levels, in the SMB segment this transformation is being powered by applications and the desire for storage consolidation.

Banking: Replacing the branch PC server

In the BFSI segment, scheduled commercial banks that have hundreds of branches need a solution that's easy to deploy and use but doesn't cost the earth. Take the scenario of the CIO of such an institution who gets fed up with having to send his scarce IT team to every branch for deploying and maintaining software and decides to instead put a NAS box in

place and run a few custom applications off it while also using it as a central store for the branch's 10-20 PCs. He also benefits from the ability to sync data from the branches to the head office at the end of every business day. What's more, he achieves all of this without having to send members of his short-staffed IT team from one remote location to another.

The individual boxes may not be that impressive with capacities being a measly TB or two but when you consider that hundreds of these will be purchased by a bank and that there would also be a corresponding opportunity at the data center where hundreds of TB of data would reside on a much beefier NAS box—it's clear why vendors like Dax Networks are bullish about this opportunity. The vendor has been tapping scheduled commercial banks such as Dhanlaxmi Bank that's deploying the vendor's products across 250 locations. It's in talks with Federal Bank for its NAS products as well. In fact, when it comes to storage, the finance sector is the biggest play for Dax. Education, retail and hospitality are other verticals where Dax is finding traction for its storage line-up.

In BFSI, applications such as data backup/sync from branches to the head office, patch management, FTP or even customized applications such as asset management running off the NAS box have all proved popular for Dax which is busy selling storage to existing customers who have deployed its networking products.

Storage consolidation

At the upper end of the SMB segment, virtualization/consolidation is leading companies to go in for NAS/iSCSI boxes. These organizations could even consider a private Cloud for their storage requirements. "AMI is moving to fulfill that need with its upcoming 3400 box will support horizontal scaling through federated storage technology enabling customers to deploy these boxes in a private Cloud scenario," said Sridharan Mani, Director and CEO, American Megatrends India.

The company has customers such as Shriram Chits that consolidated onto AMI's networked storage boxes a few years back in a phased approach that started with the networked storage box being used for backup and ended with it being used as primary storage. Later the non banking financial institution went in for additional boxes for DR across offices.

Retail sector: backup and IP surveillance

Beyond the opportunity for networked storage in scheduled commercial banks and chit funds, there is an emerging opportunity for selling storage to the retail

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OUR UPCOMING 3400 BOX WILL SUPPORT HORIZONTAL SCALING THROUGH FEDERATED STORAGE TECHNOLOGY ENABLING OUR CUSTOMERS TO DEPLOY IT IN A PRIVATE CLOUD SCENARIO

SRIVIDHARAN MANI,
DIRECTOR AND CEO, AMERICAN MEGATRENDS INDIA

sector. To begin with, the organized chains are going in for entry-level NAS boxes.

Iomega has tapped retail chains that need to maintain data stores at each outlet with the backups being consolidated at a central location. The number of locations involved is fairly substantial. Shoppers' Stop, for instance, deployed Iomega's ix2-200 boxes across 41 group stores.

In retail, where the chains are already looking to NAS boxes for storing location-wise data, the technology's price points are attractive enough that even standalone stores could well go in for entry-level NAS boxes for storing the video captured by their IP surveillance cameras with bundles priced as low as Rs. 45,000 (Rs. 15,000 for the NAS box and five IP surveillance cameras for Rs. 5,000-7,000).

Even a standalone retail establishment can afford to go in for IP surveillance at these price points, storing all the video captured on a vanilla NAS box. This is the kind of scenario that Iomega is gunning to tap. The company sells thousands of low-end storage boxes into the Indian SMB segment and it sees IP surveillance as a strong driver of demand.

"Surveillance is becoming a big area and we are hitting the analog DVR market," commented Praveen Sahai, Director of Sales, India & SAARC, for Iomega, an EMC company.

"In retail, it's a case of convincing the customer that IP surveillance trumps CCTV," commented Subhashini Prabhakar, CTO, Dax Networks. The vendor sees IP surveillance and NAS as complementary technologies.

The TINA factor

Margaret Thatcher used to talk about TINA which stands for There Is No Alternative. Networked storage has been a TINA case in the large enterprise segment for many years now. In the medium business segment, it will soon be equally ubiquitous. Small businesses will probably prove to be harder nuts to crack although vendors who are playing in that segment are gung ho about the possibilities. When it comes to networked storage for the SMB segment today the price points are right, the features and functionality are compelling and the customers are getting on board.

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