LIGHTENING THE LOAD FOR MID-MARKET USERS

STORAGE MAGAZINE EDITOR DAVID TYLER CATCHES UP WITH BRUCE LETHABY, IBM STORAGE SALES SPECIALIST AT LOGICALIS

David Tyler: Logicalis is, of course, a very large IT solutions and services provider - tell us a little about the business relationship with IBM and specifically their storage offerings.
Bruce Lethaby: We are an IBM Storage Specialty Partner, with an association with IBM that goes back over some 20-odd years: so we know a lot not just about their technology, we also know the people within IBM very well. I myself spent 20 years in IBM before moving into the channel around four years ago. What's really important in that partnership is what Logicalis 'bring to the party' in terms of how people manage their data.

We have in-depth skills in networking, data centre design, and data analytics: in short we have the ability to design a complete solution around whatever our customers' requirements might be. There are still businesses out there who are to all intents acting as a distribution operation - 'shifting tin' as they used to say. And there is still some value in the marketplace for those customers who are just saying "Ship me something that will do XYZ".

We are different. We're not solely IBM-focused - although we are very highly skilled in their offerings - but nor do we have every possible vendor available in our portfolio. Instead we have carefully chosen partners who we see to be core market leaders, and developed a real depth of skills with each of those vendors. So we offer storage, for example, from IBM, HP, NetApp and EMC that gives us a level of objectivity too. We believe that the IBM Storwize offering does indeed offer a unique level of virtualisation at a highly competitive price and is a good fit for a lot of our customers

It's important for customers to have someone advising them not just in terms of the huge range of possible hardware options out there and what might 'fit', but also someone who has the depth to be able to follow that initial consultation through: we can do the detailed professional services, we can put people in place who have in depth technical expertise and also a wealth of practical experience of delivering and running that solution.

DT: Focusing on IBM's storage offerings, I think it's fair to say that even a few years ago their portfolio wasn't seen as particularly innovative. What has changed recently that is making you feel that customers should be looking again at IBM?
BL: Having been in IBM myself for so many years and then out in the market as well, my view on IBM's storage offerings is that

yes, 5 or 6 years ago, although they were still selling storage products, they were perhaps rather in the doldrums from an innovation perspective. I think that for many people, IBM was seen - other than at the high-end - as being 'OK at storage' rather than being leading-edge.

Over the last couple of years, both through development of their existing platforms and through acquisitions such as Texas Memory Systems and their RamSan product, and of course Storwize, they've been able to really innovate. They've taken their storage virtualisation technology, which had been regarded as an enterprise product, and enhanced it and brought it into the mid-market arena with the Storwize V7000 offering.

Storwize is aimed at the mid-market, but in an era of virtualisation and clustering, the V7000 can actually scale up to 4PB, to 512GB of cache, and deliver performance of anything up to 150,000 IOPS. You could argue about whether it is a Tier 1 or Tier 2 product. The point is that you can start from a relatively small point and build out: usually with a 'pure play' Tier 1 product you have to start out with a fairly hefty deployment and a high initial cost. With Storwise V7000, you could in theory buy into our storage virtualisation technology

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for around 20,000 pounds, and have the option of massive scalability.

DT: How does the Storwize V7000 differentiate itself from the market?
BL: There are three really attractive aspects to the V7000 proposition. Firstly, the ability to virtualise other people's storage - i.e. EMC, HP, Hitachi - at a relatively low cost. If you look at other vendors, they are talking fairly heavy duty 'enterprise type' outlay to do the same thing. Their products are fine of course and work well, but in terms of reaching that mid-market customer base, they are often out of reach because of that cost. With Storwize, in contrast, you can get on board initially with very low capacity.

Another key benefit of the V7000 is Easy Tier, which gives the system the ability to automatically move data between Tier 0, Tier 1 and Tier 2. For example if users want to add Flash into the equation, it can be easily integrated into the Storwize environment. The data will automatically be moved between Flash, 15k SAS or nearline SAS for example, as required. There's no intervention required from the customer point of view: basically they buy Storwize, switch Easy Tier on and leave it. Again this appeals to those mid-market users who don't want to spend a lot of time managing

their infrastructure - they may not have a dedicated storage specialist on their staff. This lightens the load for them.

The other major differentiator of Storwize is compression, which is an area that a lot of people even in the storage industry seem to misunderstand. There is a misconception that if you compress your data, you will suffer a severe overhead in terms of processing it - and that therefore compression isn't really suitable for a production environment. The simple answer is that actually, yes it is. IBM offers real-time compression for the Storwize environment - the Storwize name actually came from an acquisition several years ago, and IBM has been building that technology into its standard storage engines ever since. This is a good example of my point earlier about how IBM has been bringing companies and technologies in and integrating them into their own R&D efforts.

DT: How does IBM - and indeed partners like Logicalis - get that message across to potential customers?
BL: We're not just saying to the market "Compression is really good, take our word for it". We can offer a pre-test in the customer's environment, and then give them an estimate of how much they might save as a result of compression. If those

results don't come to fruition, IBM will give the customer free of charge licences or hardware to make up the difference.

This 'Easy Tier Compression Guarantee' applies to workloads such as Oracle or DB2 databases, VMware, MS Exchange and SQL Server, etc. In the average customer's systems there are a lot of good 'targets' for compression, and we can do a lot of predictive analytics to ascertain just how successful compression will be in any given company's environment.

It's also worth emphasizing the ease of management of these products - there is a very intuitive GUI which came originally from IBM's XIV product. Backup is also easy, using Flashcopy Manager, which lets users backup and take snapshots of applications - again such as Oracle, DB2, SAP and others - on the fly. That gives customers the benefit of knowing they can get back to a given point in time without the pain of trying to restore a backup that might be 24 hours old by the time they access it. All the IBM midrange products are also now IP-enabled, which gives the opportunity to replicate over IP. All of these things add up to further resilience and agility for those mid-market users that we are targeting.
More info: www.uk.logicalis.com