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In this issue:

- **EMC Configures VNXe for SMBs and ROBOs**

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EMC Configures VNXe for SMBs and ROBOs

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For decades, businesses have been the beneficiaries of what might be called “trickle-down enterprise innovation” where technologies and solutions initially developed for large companies evolve or are reconfigured for smaller organizations and special use cases.

The circumstances that enable this are fairly straightforward; product development is an often expensive process, so IT vendors initially aim cutting edge solutions at deep-pocketed enterprises that don't mind paying a premium for measurable compute and business benefits. But the regular appearance of better, new technologies helps past generation products begin to travel down-market, eventually making their way into smaller businesses.

That may seem simple, but the practical value of these offerings varies pretty widely. All too many are simply dumbed-down versions of preceding solutions, with enterprise-centric functions and features hacked out or disabled in order to justify lower price points. A far better approach is found among vendors who clearly understand the technical capabilities and practical constraints of smaller organizations, and design solutions to help customers overcome those problems.

EMC's new VNXe1600 entry level storage systems clearly fits into the latter group.

Storage challenges for SMBs and ROBOs

Traditional storage solutions and vendors have felt increasing pressure from a number of alternatives, especially cloud-based storage services. In fact, many proponents claim that cloud can fulfill virtually all of the storage requirements that organizations, and especially small- to medium-sized businesses (SMBs), typically need. That's an interesting argument but one that is dangerously simplistic and misinformed.

While it's true that SMBs typically have more moderate storage requirements than larger companies, they also face many of the same data challenges and requirements. Those include secure ownership of data, such as proprietary intellectual property that is too sensitive or valuable to store in public clouds. In addition, many small businesses use or deal in information covered by various regulatory and/or compliance requirements that are best secured with traditional on-site data protection and back-up solutions.

That is also the case for remote or branch offices (ROBOs) of larger organizations, like financial institutions, insurance companies and large retailers. These facilities are too small to require on-site data centers but they do need highly effective and available computing and storage solutions to create, process, store and transmit important transactional and business data to and from central offices. The same is generally true for small workgroups and departmental organizations.

SMBs and ROBOs have other similarities when it comes to their IT requirements, including needing solutions that, while robust enough to fully support day to day business processes, are also simple enough to be operated by local staff. This isn't to imply that on-site generalists will handle any and every IT job, but the solution should allow them to deal with basic tasks and avoid calling in costly specialists for every little thing.

EMC's new VNXe1600

In order to address the onsite storage needs of both SMBs and ROBOs, EMC is leveraging its well-established, well-regarded VNXe unified storage platform. The new VNXe1600 is an entry level solution in a 2U rack enclosure that supports highly available block storage functionalities like hardware redundancy and RAID protection, and can be flexibly configured and scaled for most any SMB or ROBO IT requirement.

Like other members of the VNX family, the VNXe1600 supports local enterprise storage features, including EMC MCx (multi-core optimization), FAST Cache (Flash-based cache for enhanced storage functions on up to two drives), asynchronous replication and snapshots, 5-9's availability, and the flexibility to be configured as a hybrid flash or all flash array.

The new solution also introduces the first Converged Network Adapter (CAN) in the VNX family, and offers customers a choice between either embedded Fibre Channel (FC) or iSCSI processes (along with additional optional I/O modules supporting 8Gb FC, 10 GbE optical and 1 GbE copper).

The VNXe1600 includes a version of EMC's Unisphere management platform with Unisphere Central for remote multi-site/multi-system management. As a result, IT generalists have a simple yet effective interface for performing everyday tasks. But systems can also be seamlessly integrated with home office data center processes and procedures.

EMC claims the VNXe1600 offers best-in-class VMware integration, via vSphere storage APIs and VMware Aware Integration technologies that allow the new solution to be fully integrated with VMware vCenter and ESXi hosts. In addition, systems support VMware Site Recovery Manager (SRM), allowing it to support disaster recovery strategies and processes in virtualized environments.

The VNXe1600 also fully supports Microsoft solutions, including Windows Server 2008/2012, the company's Hyper-V virtualization platform and its offloaded data transfer (ODX) technology. In addition, the new system supports a wide variety of server operating systems, including Red Hat Enterprise Linux, SuSe Enterprise Linux, Citrix XenServer 6.1 and IBM AIX.

Final analysis

It's also well-worth considering two other issues related to EMC's new offering; pricing and routes to market. Some people mistakenly think that the company's solutions are too expensive for SMBs to even consider. But like other EMC entry level storage products, the cost

of the VNXe1600 strongly refutes that belief and proves that you need not break the bank to enjoy EMC innovations.

The company offers a starter edition of the new system with six drives for just under \$8,000.00 street price that's bundled with all necessary system software. Just under \$12,000.00 street price will buy a two tier hybrid system with SSDs as a cache and 10K disks as the data storage tier. A final point: VNXe1600 sales are being led by EMC's channel. In other words, SMB and ROBO customers will be able to purchase the systems and associated services from familiar, long-trusted sources.

Overall, EMC's new VNXe1600 qualifies as a classic example of trickle-down enterprise innovation. In essence, the company has taken many of the best qualities of its VNX family of storage solutions and incorporated them in a package designed to meet the discrete needs of small- to medium-sized businesses, remote or branch offices, and small workgroup and departmental organizations.

The result is anything but a dumbed-down version of an enterprise platform. Instead, the VNXe1600 offers proof that EMC clearly understands the capabilities of smaller organizations, empathizes with their constraints and is fully capable of designing innovative solutions to help SMBs and ROBOs fully address their fundamental on-site storage challenges.

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