PARTNER'S GUIDE TO THE
New Rules of Online Backup

Online backup and recovery is a different beast than on-premises versions. Most of the differences are positive, but online backup does require solution providers to follow a few different rules than the guidelines they used for on-site backup. **By Scott Bekker**

CLOUD BACKUP is vaulting forward by leaps and bounds for a lot of reasons. Backing up critical IT resources to the cloud can be easier and quicker to set up than on-premises infrastructure. It eliminates certain maintenance headaches such as software patches or hardware replacement cycles for the backup solution. The up-front costs of on-premises backup and recovery systems are replaced by more manageable and predictable monthly billing. There's far less planning required—customers can size their solutions precisely to their current needs and scale them up as their business grows, rather than trying to anticipate what they'll need in the future.

Research into the cloud backup market consistently puts the compound annual growth rate at about 25 percent. Orbis Research, for example, last fall released a report predicting global cloud backup market revenues would rise from $1.2 billion in 2017 to $5.5 billion by 2023. Solution providers in North America are in the thick of it. The Orbis report names North America as the leader by market share in global cloud backup.

Analysts at Gartner Inc. have also been tracking the inroads that cloud backup solutions are making into the overall backup ecosystem.

In a 2016 "Magic Quadrant for Data Center Backup and Recovery Software" report, Gartner shared several interesting assumptions from its other research about where the cloud backup market is headed. While

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focused on slightly larger organizations than the typical channel partner works with, the figures show the speed with which cloud backup is taking hold in the industry.

According to Gartner's report:

✳ By 2019, 30 percent of midsize organizations will leverage public cloud IaaS [Infrastructure as a Service] for backup, up from 5 percent today."

✳ "By 2018, the number of enterprises using the cloud as a backup destination will double, up from 11 percent at the beginning of 2016."

Like Gartner, International Data Corp. (IDC) sees cloud storage becoming a much bigger part of overall IT spending. This month, IDC released preliminary 2017 worldwide revenue estimates showing that total spending on IT infrastructure for deployment in the cloud grew by 21 percent, while non-cloud infrastructure spending fell by nearly 3 percent. Non-cloud spending was still about 57 percent of the total, but a crossover point when cloud makes up more than half of all spending appears imminent.

"As adoption of public cloud services and private cloud deployments continue to spread around the world replacing traditional on-premises hardware-centric IT settings, overall market spending on servers, storage, and networking will follow this move," said Natalya Yezhkova, research director for Enterprise Storage at IDC, in a statement. "The industry is getting closer to the point when cloud deployments will account for the majority of spending on IT infrastructure, which will be a major milestone embracing the benefits of service-centric IT."

As partners guide their customers through those monumental shifts, cloud backup is a logical place for many to use as a starting point. Yet online backup and recovery is a different beast than on-premises approaches. Most of the differences are positive, but online backup does require solution providers to follow a few different rules than the guidelines that they've long used for on-site backup.

Here are seven new rules for partners to keep in mind when setting up and providing online backup services for customers:

1. CAREFULLY PRIORITIZE DATA

Pipe gets fatter and fatter every couple of years, making the speed and amounts of data that can move from remote datacenters to a customer's system higher and higher. But it's a race that never ends, with Internet of Things devices and every kind of application generating more and more data, while ubiquitous video puts increasing strain on bandwidth. In other words, the capacity to push data over the wire constantly increases, but often not as fast as the amount of data. That's the reason that prioritizing what data gets backed up and how often is especially important when relying on cloud backup.

On-premises backup solutions are only constrained by the capacity of a local network, allowing pretty sizable amounts of data to be immediately restored. With a cloud solution, there can be a time lag. That's fine, with planning. Most data doesn't need to be restored immediately, or even anytime soon. Some data, of course, needs to be restored immediately. Partners relying on cloud backup solutions need to be sure to go through a careful data prioritization process with their customers. That process, preferably, should take place before an incident that requires recovery. The process is also a good time to set expectations with a customer about how long it will take to get all the data back from the cloud.

On the positive side of the ledger, it's a good time to talk about remote virtual instances. It's often possible to run a customer's environment from the remote copies in cloud backup scenarios. In those cases, recovery time can sometimes be faster than it is with an on-site backup.

2. TRUST BUT *VERIFY*

Anyone in the backup and recovery field is familiar with the 3:2:1 rule. At least three copies of the data, on two types of media with

5. BE RUTHLESS WITH VENDORS

An additional data point from the Gartner Magic Quadrant from 2016 was this: "By 2018, more than 50 percent of enterprise storage customers will consider bids from storage vendors that have been in business for less than five years, up from less than 30 percent today." There are a large number of vendors offering cloud backup services in a wide variety of packages based on many different technological approaches. Partners should always be on the lookout for the next big technology, or a new business model or the right solution for their niche. New offerings are emerging every few weeks, and partners who stay alert can find great deals for themselves and their customers.

6. CREATE CSP BUNDLES WITH BACKUP

Microsoft is really pushing partners to move into the Cloud Solution Provider (CSP) model. Under that model, partners sell mainly Office 365, but also the rest of Microsoft's stack of cloud products. The CSP is responsible for provisioning, billing and supporting their customers on the Microsoft products. It's an approach that partners lobbied for in order to gain control over customer billing, and to therefore be able to set their own prices and create their own margins. Yet a lot of partners simply sell Office 365 to customers through the CSP model, allowing an easy comparison to public pricing models and limiting their ability to build in a margin.

The real power of the CSP approach comes when partners bundle in other services into a per-user package with a single price, rather than an a la carte menu. That way, partners can better set a margin that includes the secret sauce of their expertise, such as a vertical specialization. One of the quickest ways to start building a bundle around Office 365 is to add on a cloud backup service.

7. GET CREATIVE

The burgeoning infrastructure of the cloud is enabling all kinds of cloud backup solutions. There are SaaS-based services, there are cloud-backup appliances, there are IaaS-based services. There's the possibility of rolling your own solution on IaaS or Platform as a Service (PaaS). There are cloud archiving solutions, as well as Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS). Many of those approaches can be mixed and matched, with the only limitation being what the partner can imagine and what the customer will buy. Cloud backup and recovery is in the midst of an explosion of creativity, and partners can be at the center of the action. •

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one of them off-site. While they don't remove the rule, cloud backup solutions take care of much of it. After all, there's a second copy of the data at a different site. Most of the time, the cloud backup vendor is replicating the data to protect against scenarios where some of its own systems go down. Trust the vendor to take care of much of the 3:2:1 rule for your customers, but just verify how it's going about doing that.

3. TEST, TEST, TEST

Just because the data is safely stored off in the cloud, doesn't mean it isn't still important to test as aggressively as you would with an on-premises solution. Testing that backups occur and that they can be recovered is an often-overlooked step, and almost always a process that isn't done often enough. In the case of cloud backup, it can be a good opportunity to see how long recovery actually takes, giving the partner and customer a chance to revisit earlier decisions about data priority.

4. LAND AND EXPAND

Within backup, cloud backup tends to come into a customer organization in a few specific areas. Recent Gartner research found that many early adopters brought on cloud specifically for backing up Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) applications only, such as Office 365, or strictly for backing up endpoints. Both are good places for partners to start introducing cloud backup into customer accounts, but Gartner also found that cloud backup quickly earned consideration for other roles once it was being used for some functions. A few sensible expansion areas include remote office/branch offices for larger or distributed organizations and line-of-business applications.

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