

## PARTNER'S GUIDE TO Selling High Availability



A detailed new survey shows enterprises need high availability more than ever, but partners selling the solutions must overcome the competing priorities of reducing datacenter costs and improving security.

**By Scott Bekker**

**A** major new vendor survey of enterprise IT decision maker attitudes toward high availability reveals good opportunities for channel partners to sell sophisticated solutions for datacenters. But the opportunities will only be available if partners can grapple with a few significant obstacles—namely datacenter cost reduction imperatives and prioritization of security improvements.

High-availability specialist Veeam Software released the survey earlier this year based on interviews in late 2015 with 1,140 senior IT staff in 24 countries, including 150 people in the United

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States. It was Veeam's fifth annual "Availability Report," and it represented a much more ambitious effort than the year before with about twice as many interviews conducted by a third-party researcher. All of the respondents worked at companies with at least 1,000 employees.

The main priorities competing with high availability in datacenter spending were lowering operational costs for IT and strengthening security and control. Each of those responses was picked by two-thirds of the survey respondents as major business drivers for their organizations' datacenter modernization spending. "This supports the view that the IT department is under pressure to not only improve availability and minimize downtime, but also to lower costs while doing so," the report stated. Meanwhile, security had an especially high priority in the United States: "Italy and the [United States] are the countries where IT [decision makers] are most likely to say that they are trying to strengthen security in order to modernize their datacenter."

Further, the survey found that about half of respondents viewed the cost of new availability technologies as a barrier to adoption. “Cost is increasingly likely to be the main barrier relative to other issues,” according to the report. “The cost of new technology is the only barrier reported by more than one-third of IT [decision makers].”

The study focuses on IT decision-maker attitudes, and the cost-related results are fairly bracing. Yet the results point to several major opportunities for Baar, Switzerland-based Veeam’s 37,000 ProPartners and for other availability-focused solution providers to counter those executives’ objections to spending on high availability.

As Veeam CEO Ratmir Timashev puts it in a statement about the results, “While it’s easy to think that this survey paints a picture of doom and gloom, there are shoots of optimism, as well.”



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Let’s look at seven opportunities uncovered in the numbers.

### 1. SHOOT THROUGH THE AVAILABILITY GAP

Veeam brands a concept called an Availability Gap, which it describes as “the gap between what users demand ([for example,] 24x7 access to critical applications and data) and what IT departments can deliver.” It’s a useful term for that source of stress in an IT department, and according to the survey, almost all IT departments feel it. The survey found that 84 percent of respondents agree that their organizations have an Availability Gap. Respondents also reported an average of three to four demands from end users to keep downtime to a minimum (although the report did not indicate from what level in the organizational hierarchy those requests were coming). Some sources of increased demand for always-on systems included more frequent and real-time interactions among customers, partners, suppliers and employees; globalization across time zones; need for after-hours access by employees with mobile devices; and zero-tolerance attitudes from users for downtime and data loss. Whatever the cause, IT departments seem to be feeling the burn of an Availability Gap, and partners who can keep the focus on that pain point might be able to close a deal.

### 2. EMPHASIZE THE HARD COST OF DOWNTIME

There’s more to system downtime than pressure and embarrassment—there’s dollars or euros or whatever the applicable currency. The availability survey attempted to quantify it and came up with a worldwide average cost per business per year of \$16 million. The figure for U.S. respondents was an average of \$13.6 million.

### 3. EMPHASIZE THE SOFT COSTS OF DOWNTIME

Money isn’t the only cost of a downtime event. In another question, survey respondents were asked to rate some of the secondary effects of a datacenter outage, and there were many (some of them were also monetary but in a different way). The soft costs of an outage, in descending order, included loss of customer confidence, damage to brand integrity, loss of employee confidence, diversion of resources from long-term or critical projects, reduced stock price, potential legal action, and revocation of licenses or accreditations. Looking at all of those together, the report stated, “This can also have an impact upon their ability to save money, which illustrates once more that the twin IT department targets of minimizing downtime while reducing operational costs can be counterproductive.”

### 4. CALL OUT MORE FREQUENT DOWNTIME

Respondents also reported that they had more unplanned downtime events in the year leading up to this survey than they

reported for the year before. In the survey conducted in 2014, the average was 13 events. This time it was 15 events. The average length of the events was also longer—at 1.9 hours, up from 1.4 hours. Downtime really stretched out for non-mission-critical applications, which went up to 5.8 hours from 4 hours.

## 5. GET IN THERE AND HELP CUSTOMERS TEST

The survey also highlighted potential problems with the way organizations test their data. A backup or a replication solution that isn't tested frequently enough is a crashshoot. Yet many organizations admitted to testing very infrequently. There was a healthy 55 percent that was testing either daily (16 percent) or weekly (39 percent). Another group, 27 percent, was testing its processes monthly, which is on the bubble of best practices. Some 14 percent were testing quarterly, 4 percent were testing yearly and a sliver was never testing. Cross-tabbing the result with another question could lead to some alarming results: respondents were asked how much of their data they were testing and only 26 percent test more than 5 percent of their backups. Once again, these mildly alarming results represent an opportunity for partners to get engaged with their customers on helping them set up a best practices backup/replication testing process. That engagement in turn has the potential to turn into conversations about additional high-availability protection for the datacenter.

## 6. SHOW HOW BACKUP CAN BOOST TESTING

Another wrinkle on the testing question involves a different capability. Some reasonably sophisticated organizations use their backup files as a test-dev environment. Say, for example, Microsoft releases an OS patch. Organizations with the right configurations can test the patch on their backup environment before rolling it out to their production environment. While there's an expenditure involved in lighting up the capability to test backups in high-availability solutions, there's a huge potential savings. As revealed in another question about how often patching leads to unexpected downtime and other unforeseen problems, nearly 48 percent responded that patches regularly cause that kind of trouble.

Only four out of 10 respondents were currently using backups for testing. Cost was a barrier, with 52 percent of respondents saying using backup data for a test environment was a capability they'd be interested in, but it was too costly. That's an area where a partner can lay out the math related to patch-related downtime and potentially make a sale. One other benefit for the channel—using backup data for a test environment was the area that got the highest scores (38 percent) from decision makers responding that it was too complex to deploy, or that the organization lacked the necessary expertise. That makes it a perfect situation for a partner.



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## 7. BE READY WITH MORE SOPHISTICATED SOLUTIONS

Cloud, replication and snapshots are the hot topics in high availability, and they're growing while regular-old backup is in decline. Yet that decline comes from a huge lead, meaning channel partners need to shift gears gradually. They have to be ready with the next-generation solutions when customers start asking, but they need to be able to keep delivering the old-school approaches until customers say they're done with them.

For example, the survey asked what technologies companies currently use and what they expect to use in two years. Off-site backup falls 3 percentage points by that measure, while off-site replication jumps 7 percentage points. Yet in two years, the declining off-site backup will still be at 63 percent, while off-site replication will only reach 43 percent.

"The rate of adoption is slow, and the majority of respondents expect to continue using the older services in the near future," the report states.

Selling high availability has challenges given the pressures on datacenter spending right now. But the survey points the way to opportunities for partners to show how the right high-availability investments can help an enterprise meet broader organizational goals. •

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Scott Bekker is editor in chief of Redmond Channel Partner magazine.



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