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Struggling with supersized storage

Shrinking budgets and swelling data demands send IT managers on a search for more efficient storage.

By John Edwards

April 6, 2009 12:00 PM ET

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Computerworld - Tasty Baking Co. produces more than 4.8 million cakes, doughnuts, cookies and pies each day. And the Philadelphia-based snack food giant also manages to generate another crucial commodity -- computer data -- in equally impressive amounts. "It's something to be concerned about," says Brendan O'Malley, [Tasty Baking's](#) vice president and CIO.

Like a growing number of businesses worldwide, Tasty Baking is facing a data explosion. The use of e-mail and rich media applications plus the need to stay on top of regulatory compliance are stretching storage resources to the limit at a time when budgets are shrinking. Handling rapidly spiraling storage needs without spending tons of money is a challenge that's facing just about all IT managers. O'Malley crystallizes the need into a single phrase: "More space for the money."

To get a handle on storage demands, IT managers need to carefully examine internal storage practices, use specialized software tools and find appropriate storage systems for various kinds of data. Andrew Reichman, an analyst at Forrester Research Inc., says that they must look first at the two best ways of cutting storage costs. "One is using more-dense drives, and the other is reducing your footprint," he says.

Footprint reduction is relatively easy, says Reichman, asking, "Can you use the Delete key?" But David Hill, founder of The Mesabi Group, a storage management consultancy in Westwood, Mass., notes that many businesses, particularly those in regulated industries, are scared stiff of deleting anything other than spam. "There are a lot of legal reasons, tax reasons," he says. "You have to be careful about how you go about getting rid of data."

Fixed vs. Fluid

Although managers may be reluctant to flush files, they can [bring greater efficiency and cost savings to their storage processes by organizing data more efficiently](#). Hill recommends separating fixed content -- e-mails, boilerplate documents and other rarely modified files -- from active archives that contain more fluid types of data, such as transactional data.

Hill notes that many businesses unthinkingly use costly, high-performance [Fibre Channel](#) storage environments for both

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types of data. Yet splitting up fixed and active data makes it possible to use less-expensive storage technologies for less volatile information. "You can use what's called capacity storage instead of performance storage," Hill says.

- Controlling costs: **11%**
- Provisioning storage: **8%**
- Deploying tiered storage solutions: **7%**
- Performing effective application restores: **6%**
- Generating accurate and useful reports on the environment: **6%**
- Maintaining a high backup success rate: **3%**
- Deploying effective multipath solutions: **2%**
- Other: **1%**

Source:Forrester Research Inc. survey of 124 global IT decision-makers currently using x86 server virtualization technology, September-October, 2008

Capacity storage usually comes in the form of Serial ATA drives, which have higher capacity but cost less than other options. "So you get more bang for your buck," Hill says. "That's one thing that businesses can do: move some of their data to these lower-cost drives."

O'Malley agrees that organizing content is a relatively easy way to cut costs. "We have some high-performance applications that run on Fibre Channel, and other applications that don't need that kind of performance that we run on regular SATA types of disks, where we have a better price for performance," he says.

[Data de-duplication](#) -- the process of eliminating redundant files -- can also save precious storage space. Backup products that de-duplicate data at the host level include [Asigra's TeleVaulting](#), [EMC's Avamar](#) and [Symantec's Veritas NetBackup PureDisk](#). Disk libraries from Data Domain, Diligent Technologies, EMC, Quantum and Sepaton de-duplicate data at the target level, such as the desktop. Both methods determine whether data segments or files are identical by running a file-level comparison or using a hashing algorithm.

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