

The impact of environmental catastrophes

The plague of natural disasters in New Zealand, northern Japan and in our very own backyard here in Queensland and Victoria during 2011 did more than devastate infrastructure, communities and local economies. In the age of the connected global economy, the floods in Thailand late last year proved once again that natural disasters have the ability to transcend much further than streets, towns and country borders to impact economies all over the world.

The floods in the south of the country affected many industrial factories and critical infrastructure which included a number of hard disk manufacturing facilities. The fact is Thailand accounts for as much as 40% of the world's production of magnetic disk drives which go into everything from consumer devices such as tablets, notebooks and PVR's right through to ultra large scale commercial storage arrays. With an ever growing explosion in the amount of data being created every year sucking up the thirst for disks, this has put significant pressure on supply forcing up unit pricing between 5% and 30%.

This creates a significant challenge for businesses which are not only grappling with managing the sheer growth of data but also having to do more with less with conservative or flat IT budgets. Factoring in a price increase on top of all this just makes the whole challenge that much tougher.

The good news is here in Australia and New Zealand, we should see a portion of that price rise absorbed by a strengthened Aussie dollar, however that will not guarantee we duck the problem altogether as unit production is forecasted to be tight for at least the first half of this year. This requires us to 'Think Different' as Steve Jobs famously said in the mid 80's.

To draw on a familiar analogy, when money starts to get tight, we immediately think about how we can get more out of every dollar. We cut out luxuries that are not necessary, and for the must have's we look for alternatives that give us the same function for better value. This is exactly what we need to do when it comes to managing our data!

Thankfully, over the past four to five years we have seen significant innovation from the storage industry that makes our data smarter.

Storage virtualisation, much like server virtualisation enables you to pool all your disparate storage resources together under one roof to allocate capacity more effectively and control things like provisioning and data protection with less effort, eliminating waste and delivering a cost saving.

Technologies such as 'thin provisioning' ensure that storage is allocated only when the application needs it, avoiding the problem of over allocating capacity when it is not being used. By converting existing 'thick provisioned' storage to 'thin', reclaim as much as 30% of storage helping defer additional capacity purchases or avoiding them all together.

Building on thin provisioning technology, automatic tiering functionality intelligently places segments of data across multiple tiers of storage, for example Solid State Disk, high speed SAS and low speed SATA. By placing data in the most appropriate tier according to its access, you can more effectively align your budgets for storage to the most appropriate cost of media.

Much like thin provisioning, a new technology which has been getting a lot of attention over the past couple of years has been data de-duplication. The fact is, in most storage repositories (especially file servers and e-mail) we store the same or similar thing multiple times. By identifying the common

data patterns, you can eliminate the duplication and store it only once, freeing up capacity for genuinely unique data.

Thinking differently about your data and utilising some of these smart technologies can not only help go the extra mile with your storage assets you have today and avoid the temporary price rises, but can have a lasting affect by making your data management practice more efficient to deal with the growth in years to come.

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