

Monday, 07 July 2008

Tape backups still a required technology

While not quite as sexy as LCD screens and laptops, the linear tape-open (LTO) storage market is still maintaining strong growth. Jacques van Zijl, product manager at technology distributor Ingram Micro South Africa, looks at how it compares to disk-based solutions.

For the uninitiated, LTO is a magnetic tape data storage technology that Quantum, HP, and IBM developed as an open alternative to the proprietary digital linear tape (DLT) format. While LTO technology was designed to come in two form factors (Accelis and Ultrium), the Ultrium format has grown in popularity to such an extent that there are virtually no Accelis drives or media commercially available any more.

But why should companies even care about tape drives in an age where disk-based backup and recovery is ubiquitous and the popularity of online solutions is starting to take off?

Despite these "new" technologies, the tape drive market is still growing very nicely. While many companies do not rely on tape drives as their primary source of backup, tapes are still the de facto standard when it comes to archival solutions.

Regulatory and compliance issues are also ensuring that companies need to maintain their records for a much longer

time. This long-term storage is ideal in a tape environment that does not deteriorate nearly as fast as disk-based systems.

Still going strong

A recent analyst report shows that LTO storage accounted for more than 70 percent of the mid-range super drive (100GB per cartridge or more) unit shipments in 2004. With big technology companies like IBM, HP, and Quantum still strongly marketing LTO-based systems this growth should not see a steep decline any time soon.

Some analysts also suggest that any impact that disk-based or other backup solutions might have on the tape market will be offset by increased sales of libraries driven by compliance requirements.

Unfortunately, certain vendors create a perception that tape-based systems are not as reliable as disk-based ones. However, many companies have come out in defence of LTO technology saying that a lot of the failure rates they have experienced was due to human error and not hardware failure.

More cost-effective

Some vendors also criticise the cost of tape-based solutions. However, a study conducted by the Data Mobility Group that compares the long-term costs of disk and tape, found that tape could be significantly less expensive than disk.



By way of example, the firm compared the costs associated with an LTO-2 tape library to a SATA disk system. The comparison assumed that a company would typically need to store 50TB of data over several years. A host of other factors were also included in the study with the results showing that the tape-based solution was 11 percent less expensive than the disk-based one.

While backup and storage technologies are changing at a rapid pace, the ability of LTO to keep ahead of the curve will be paramount. With last year's approval of LTO-4 that supports up to 800GB of data, the future is looking good for these tape-based solutions.

ENDS

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Ingram Micro South Africa is a joint venture between Ingram Micro Europe, a division of Ingram Micro Inc, (NYSE: IM) and MB Technologies, established to market and distribute components and other technology products to VARs, system builders and integrators, and manufacturers throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

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