Snapshot

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EMC Piranha Bites Into Low-End Storage Needs

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Small enterprise computing or entry-level storage needs have traditionally translated to JBOD (just a bunch of disks) solutions, as advanced capabilities were previously only available to those with who could afford high-end solutions. Nevertheless, small enterprises need to manage and access corporate data and could benefit from these technologies. To address this market need, EMC announced on May 26, 2004 the CLARiiON AX100 (code-named Piranha), an entry-level networked storage solution with enterprise features scaled for the simplicity and price point requirements of small enterprises or branch offices. This report will take a look at the market for the AX100, explore the product features, describe which customers can benefit most from this product, and examine EMC's enhancements to its worldwide channel program in support of the AX100.

Making Intelligent and Economical Storage Choices

Most organizations traditionally treated storage as an adjunct to server purchases. Large organizations with volumes of data pioneered the move to networked storage, but now even mid-market and small enterprises find themselves needing the benefits of networked storage. Multiple factors are motivating operations to embrace networked storage including:

▫ Server upgrades and/or consolidation

▫ Microsoft Windows 2000 end-of-life

▫ Microsoft Exchange 2000 end-of-life

▫ Migrations to Linux

▫ Increased pressures on backup and recovery

▫ Records retention and regulatory compliance initiatives

These infrastructure changes provide opportunities for IT managers to consolidate dispersed storage to a centralized environment. Growing regulatory compliance requirements in various sectors is beginning to affect storage requirements, forcing companies to rethink their IT policies. Many will want to centralize data from one or more applications. While this is an opportunity to apply a strategic approach to storage, it is also a significant shift into unknown territory for many IT managers.

In addition to changes in applications and operating systems, enterprises struggle with creeping complexity and challenges of corporate growth. The majority of IT departments do not have the ability to scale IT department size or skill sets at the rate with which technology evolves. To combat this, many IT managers are looking for solutions that can help make their infrastructure easier to manage. In tandem with tackling complexity, most IT departments are facing high-availability requirements for certain applications. Even small enterprises have mission-critical data that must be available as needed. Finally, because storage has been server-focused and not necessarily application-focused, overall storage utilization is lower than optimum. Networked storage gives companies the ability to use their storage more efficiently and provide an opportunity for lower costs. For all of

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these reasons, EMC has designed the latest member of its mid-range CLARiiON product, the AX100, to meet these needs.

Catching a Line on Feisty Piranha

The new CLARiiON AX100 is specifically designed to meet the needs of mid to small enterprise customers. As a member of the CLARiiON family, it shares a strong heritage within mid-range storage, to reassure cautious buyers that they are acquiring proven technology backed by a trusted brand. While EMC is a well known player in large enterprises, it is not well known in smaller organizations. Customers are likely to know EMC more by reputation than through experience as EMC built its reputation on high-end storage, and driving value down into mid-market offerings as well. Now EMC is addressing the need for entry-level networked storage at DAS (direct attached storage) prices, with a product designed for this market but with the pedigree of its more mature cousins.

The new AX100 integrates hardware and functionality into one system. While meeting the stringent pricing requirements of the entry-level market, EMC made the product easy to install, service, and manage. The system comes equipped with up to twelve Serial ATA drives, providing up to 3 terabytes of storage plus EMC's data management functionality that provides for Web-based management of the array in a style similar to Windows Explorer, a familiar GUI for IT managers. Although the product is easy to configure through wizards, it also provides advanced features, such as snapshots, which allow managers to make a copy of the logical unit (LUN) representing the drive at a point in time. This snapshot is then saved independently of subsequent changes made to the drive. This feature, while common in mid-range and high-end systems, is now available to entry-level users. Given the need for organizations to do away with the dreaded "backup window," snapshots improve the backup process as backups are taken from the snapshot of the data rather than the production environment.

The AX100 ships ready for networked storage, but can be used in a DAS configuration as well. It can also be turned into NAS (network attached storage), a SAN (storage area network), or converged duty providing both file and block level data depending on customers' wishes. To provide high availability, the AX100 also includes path failover and balancing capabilities that provide for channel failover at the array and the host. While these features may seem complex, this product is easy to install. EMC has demonstrated sub-30-minute installation times by untrained users.

Making the Leap to Networked Storage

IT managers in small enterprises know that their data is strategically important to their organization and requires a more strategic approach than appending it to a server. At the same time, for many the greatest difficulty is in knowing where to start. The announcement of the CLARiiON AX100 means that for the first time, managers have a realistic option beyond adding more disks to a server. They can now add functionality and manageability features without significantly increasing the cost of the system.

The AX100 will be available through EMC's expanded channel partner network, which includes resellers and OEMs such as Dell, Tech Data, Fujitsu-Siemens, Arrow Electronics Inc., Avnet Hall-Mark, Bell Micro, MTI, Ideal, CDW, OpenWay, Samsung, Skydata, Bull, and Source, amongst others. Channels are the traditional providers of IT solutions to small enterprises. Through product innovation and channel expansion EMC has given its partners a new platform on which to provide increasing levels of added value to their customers through a range of additional products and services.

IT managers who want to make the leap to networked storage while giving data and information management a more strategic role in their IT architecture, or who are looking for ways to make storage more manageable within their environment are well advised to investigate the new CLARiiON AX100 offering from EMC.

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