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Disaster recovery applications drive SMB virtualization adoption

Interest in server virtualization among small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) continues to rise. IT solution providers say successful solutions require education and handholding, but that the investment makes it easier to manage those accounts, especially for disaster recovery applications.

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Jay Tipton, CEO of [Technology Specialists](#), an IT services company in Fort Wayne, Ind., said more than 50% of his small and midsize business clients are now using virtualized servers, with some automatically opting for virtualized configurations. That makes it easier for his team to keep those servers up and running, especially if a problem occurs.

"It takes away the recovery problems; it's much easier to do this [from a virtualized server] than from tape," Tipton said. "It makes our life easier from a management standpoint." He said virtualization also allows his technicians to keep tighter control of server configurations so that settings are less likely to be changed accidentally.

Guy Baroan, president of [Baroan Technologies](#), an IT solution provider in Elmwood Park, N.J., said most of the server hardware that his company sells is virtualization-ready. It doesn't make sense for cost-conscious businesses to buy a server for just one intended use.

"Everyone pretty much opts for this," Baroan said. The free VMware server software, ESXi, has helped encourage smaller companies to explore virtualization technologies, he added.

While the solution providers interviewed for this market update are all deploying Microsoft Hyper-V in certain situations, their default recommendation for virtualization software is some flavor of the VMware platform.

Recent data from Forrester Research Inc. underscores solution providers' anecdotal evidence. The company's ongoing Forrsights Hardware Survey found that 65% of SMBs (companies with 20 to 999 employees) planned to make maintaining or implementing [server virtualization](#) a "critical" or "high" priority throughout 2011. Very small businesses (defined as having two to 19 employees) were also interested in server virtualization, but to a lower degree. Around 42 % of those responding to Forrester's survey described server virtualization as a critical or high priority.

The five top motivations among companies of all sizes were the following:

- to improve IT infrastructure manageability and flexibility;
- to create a more efficient, shared IT infrastructure;
- to lower total cost of ownership for servers;
- to improve disaster recovery and business continuity; and
- for faster deployment or time-to-market.

M.J. Shoer, president and virtual chief technology officer for [Jenaly Technology Group](#), a technology solution provider and managed services provider in Portsmouth, N.H., stopped short of describing server virtualization as a mainstream solution for his clients. In fact, for some of them, his company has deployed virtualization behind the scenes as a management strategy.

“Where we do a hefty amount of virtualization is in the replication of data and the protection of data,” Shoer said.

Benson Yeung, senior partner for [Triware Network Solutions](#), a network integrator company in Santa Clara, Calif., said SMB virtualization can also create a need for additional network bandwidth that often gets overlooked. Companies need a minimum of Gigabit Ethernet, although 10 GB is a better option, he said. For that reason, he cautioned solution providers from centering the primary benefit of the virtualization solutions they are recommending on the cost-savings implications.

“To do a virtual environment right, you need the right kind of hardware across the board, with lots of memory and high-bandwidth throughput,” Yeung said.

About the expert

Heather Clancy is an award-winning business journalist in the New York area with more than 20 years' experience. Her articles have appeared in Entrepreneur, Fortune Small Business, the International Herald Tribune and The New York Times. Clancy was previously editor at Computer Reseller News, a B2B trade publication covering news and trends about the high-tech channel.

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