

Cost-Effective Data Protection for ROBO

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Few companies today are located in a single spot. Distributed sites – remote offices and branch offices – mean that both workers and data tend to be widely distributed, and present a special challenge for IT when it comes to protecting data that may be spread across widely dispersed locations.

Protecting Remote Data – The Impossible Dream?

Remote offices and branch offices (ROBO) present a series of problems that are quite different from those of the data center. Remote data is frequently as important - and in many cases maybe even more important - as the data in the corporate data center, but how can such data be protected when it is thousands of miles away from the IT support team and stored at a site with no local IT expertise at all? IT services available to most of the world's ROBO sites can never hope to match the services available in the corporate data center, although IT managers have done their best to do so. At larger remote sites, corporate managers have tried to put in place scaled-down versions of their data center storage capabilities, but because this requires staffing the remote site, this approach is expensive and cannot be economically deployed to smaller locations.

Geographically dispersed business operations present a similar challenge to both the largest companies with hundreds or even thousands of locations, and to SMEs and midmarket companies that may have no more than a few dozen remote offices and branches – how can they centrally manage all the data and adequately protect it in all their remote sites?

Unfortunately, suitable and cost-efficient alternatives have never been available, so that when it comes to protecting remote sites, many CIOs have come to rely heavily on crossing their fingers.

Failed Alternatives

What are the alternatives? In most cases, they are quite familiar: backing up to tape, WAN and WAFS services, installing remote appliances, or relying on individuals to back up their own data.

Tape backups are challenging even in a professionally staffed data center; there is little history of success implementing this sort of operation at a remote site. Ignoring the fact that tape backups typically do not address desktop data nor make it easy to restore single files, remote sites lack staff to change media and locate tapes, and cannot be managed remotely from the data center. Even if it were economical to place tape devices in remote offices, recovering data rapidly is unlikely in the extreme.

Some data centers rely on **WAN** and **WAFS** (wide area file services) technologies, which themselves rely on expensive (and usually proprietary) backend storage. These create complicated environments that require significant remote management interaction from data center staff.

Appliances have been deployed to remote sites, one-each for every IT service being provided to the remote location. However, the value of using appliances – simple to install, simple to use – diminishes with each appliance being stacked at the remote site: the individual appliances cannot work with each other, resulting in a sprawl of silo-ed services, and creating yet more complexity.

What does ROBO need?

While useful solutions for protecting remote data are rare, there are certainly products available for purchase. Most are either high cost solutions offering unnecessary performance or are low-end products originally aimed at the consumer market that lack the necessary management features and scalability.

What is needed is a solution that provides *appropriate performance*, is *affordable*, *easy to deploy and manage*, and can *grow as needs increase*.

The final alternative, relying on individuals to back up their own desktop machines, hardly needs mentioning except to say that it is a rare system administrator who is likely to risk a career on such a data protection policy.

Ultimately, a combination of costly equipment, lack of on-site IT expertise, and an inability to manage remote processes to enable the enforcement of a formal backup regimen dooms all such approaches.

Simple Solutions from CTERA

Thanks to developments in cloud storage and inexpensive storage hardware, it is now possible for a single solution to provide local shared storage, remote shared storage, data protection and backup, with a sub-\$1,000 entry price per ROBO location.

Appliances from CTERA are designed with remote and branch offices in mind, and come with several RAID levels that provide improved performance, increased data protection, or both. All software is included; there is no need to buy multiple appliances (i.e., one for NAS, another for D2D backups, another for cloud backup), multiple software licenses, or incur added expense for 3rd party backup and recovery software.

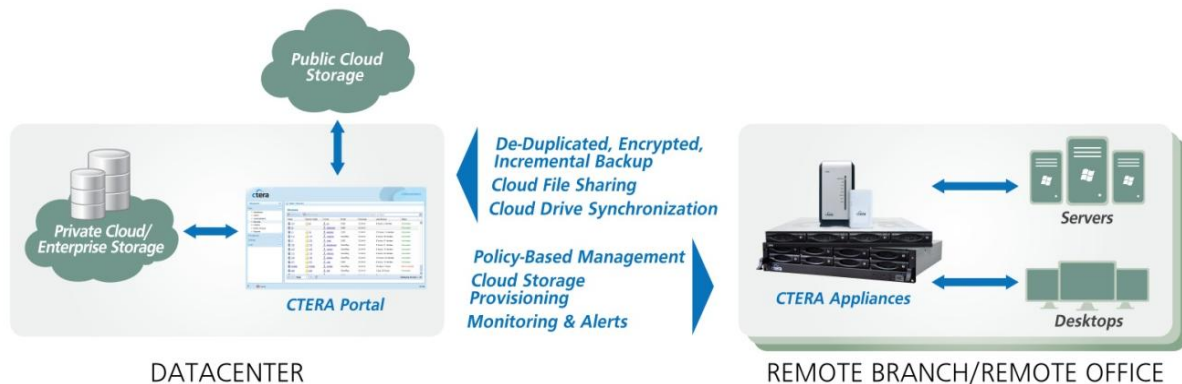


Figure 1: Flexible back-end cloud storage and scalable end-to-end data protection

The included software allows remote sites to access public or private cloud backup and recovery services automatically, to synchronize folders and to share files across the network. This is secure storage, which provides secure remote access from anywhere.

Since on-site IT support at branches and remote offices is expensive, CTERA's policy-based management software enables monitoring and management of all branches from a single console within the data center, so that a manager in the data center can set and enforce policies for data protection at remote sites anywhere on the globe, scale storage at individual sites, and initiate policy changes at hundreds or thousands of remote sites in order to enforce IT policies and address issues of corporate governance, all with only few keystrokes.

The Final Word

Ptak/Noel has advocated the use of appliances for years as a means of simplifying some aspects of IT. Now, we see the CTERA solution as an excellent example of how appliance-based technologies can be taken to the next level.

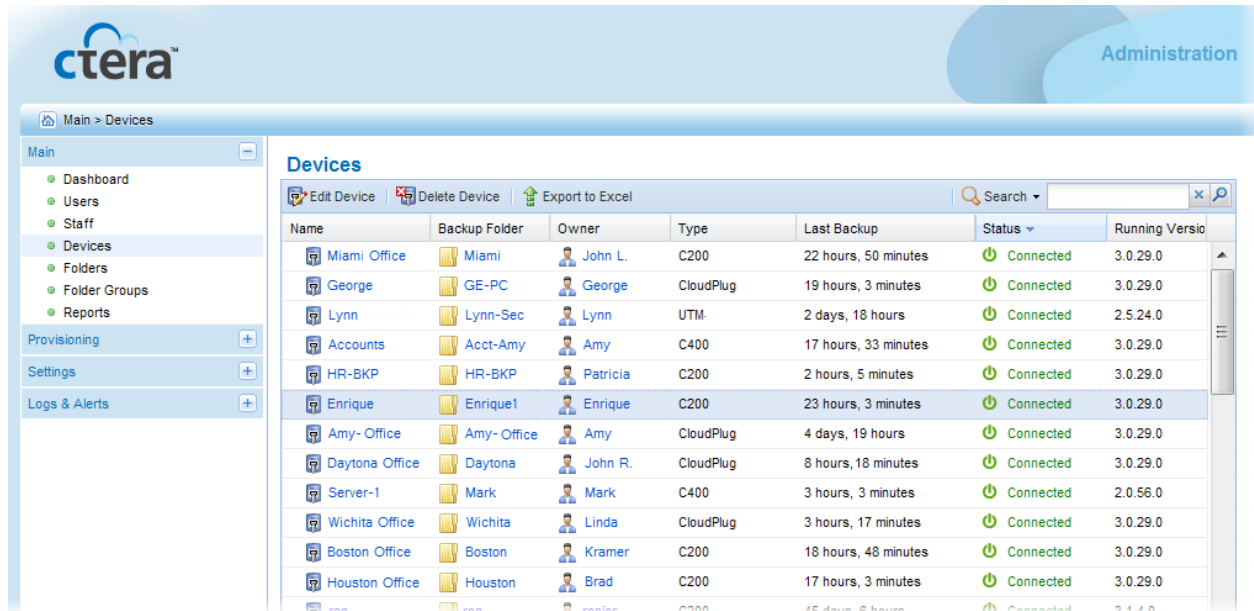


Figure 2: CTERA Portal can manage tens of thousands of remote storage devices

The CTERA devices scale easily, so administrators only need to buy what they need at present, deferring further investment to when the need arises. The solution is affordably priced. It incorporates several critical functions (file sharing, cloud access, etc.) within a single device, preempting concerns about appliance sprawl. This all-in-one approach – and most importantly, the built-in ability to manage just about every aspect of remote data protection from a corporate data center – will clearly reduce operational expenses, as well as capital expenditure for corporate IT, while allaying managers' worries about just how protected their remote data actually is.

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We help IT organizations become “solution initiators” in using IT management technology to business problems. We do that by translating vendor strategy & deliverables into a business context that is communicable and actionable by the IT manager, and by helping our clients understand how other IT organizations are effectively implementing solutions with their business counterparts. Our customers recognize the meaningful breadth and objectivity of our research in IT management technology and process.

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Mike Karp is vice president and principal analyst at Ptak, Noel & Associates, and leads the firm's practices in infrastructure analytics and storage management. He has spent 30 years in storage, systems management, and telecom at both Fortune 500 and start-up companies, and has extensive tactical and strategic experience in business development, strategic alliance/channel programs, marketing, and industry research and analysis. Mike focuses his practice on the intersection point between technology and sales.

He contributes frequently to trade publications, the business press, and corporate announcements, and speaks frequently at industry conferences. He was a featured speaker on storage on NPR, and for six years was author of NetworkWorld's *Storage in the Enterprise* newsletter.