



INVESTING IN DATA STORAGE

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESS EXECUTIVES

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WHY CARE ABOUT STORAGE?

As you drive for better business performance through key development initiatives and modern working practices, you will inevitably stress your IT infrastructure in new and different ways. This includes the storage systems that hold your business information - customer data, transaction records, employee documents, and other digital content your business relies on to function. While this may not be something you have thought much about, it's becoming an important consideration in the new world of 'digital'. So what do you need to know to discuss storage requirements and investments with your IT team in an informed and objective manner? Let's start with a look at how the pursuit of business objectives creates data-related challenges that ultimately translate to storage system requirements:

SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES



Drive for customers, market share, revenue and profit

Transformation to digital business and modern working practices

CHALLENGE



More users, more data, more business transactions

Richer, more diverse and faster-flowing information

STORAGE REQUIREMENT



Expandable systems that scale smoothly and predictably

Versatile systems that perform well, whatever you throw at them

KEEPING THE BUSINESS RUNNING SAFELY AND SECURELY



Assure continuous operation of the business

Protect brand reputation and assure regulatory compliance



Ensuring critical data is always available when and where it's needed

Ensuring that data is only accessed by those authorised to do so



Reliable systems that recover quickly from disasters, with no loss of business data

Secure systems that can encrypt and decrypt data on the fly without slowing down

MANAGING RESOURCES, COSTS AND OVERHEADS EFFECTIVELY



Focus IT staff on activities that deliver real business value

Reduction of overall IT-related Capex and Opex



Pressure on IT to spend less time on routine administration

Use less space and energy, and extend the life of equipment



Self-managing systems that mostly look after themselves

Efficient, future-proof systems that don't need frequent replacing

MAKING SENSE OF THE TECHNOLOGY

Having reviewed what your business needs from storage systems and why, let's now provide you with some insights into how modern technology in this space meets the kind of requirements we have been discussing. As we go through this, we'll assume little or no technical knowledge, and will explain any jargon that it will be useful for you to know along the way. This will enable you to better discuss storage modernisation requirements with technical staff, or even proactively press them on whether the current storage and data management solutions in place are up to dealing with what they will have to cope with over the coming months and years.

SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

STORAGE REQUIREMENT



Expandable systems that scale smoothly and predictably



HOW THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY HELPS

In a modern solution, you can add more storage as you need it over time, e.g. via additional, higher-capacity and/or faster disks. With expansion and enhancement designed in from the outset, you can also exploit the latest tech as it appears.



Versatile systems that perform well whatever you throw at them



Modern systems contain the same high-performance processors as full computers. Together with fast networking, this means they can handle the advanced functions required to meet today's needs, while keeping your data flowing.

KEEPING THE BUSINESS RUNNING SAFELY AND SECURELY



Reliable systems that recover quickly from disasters with no loss of business data



Features such as 'snapshotting' and 'replication' ensure that a copy of your data is always taken for safe keeping. And if a failure occurs, automated 'failover' means that systems are quickly back online with minimal business interruption.



Secure systems that can encrypt and decrypt your data on the fly without slowing down



Beyond preventing performance issues in general, the fast processors mentioned above also mean you have enough computing power to continuously and automatically apply encryption* to as much of your data as you choose.

MANAGING RESOURCES, COSTS AND OVERHEADS EFFECTIVELY



Self-managing systems that mostly look after themselves



Like vintage cars - older storage solutions need continuous maintenance, tuning and fixing by someone who knows what they are doing. Modern storage systems, like modern cars, need very little time, knowledge and effort to keep running.



Efficient, future-proof systems that don't need frequent upgrading or replacing



Today's powerful, flexible and energy-efficient systems mean you can spread costs (buy what you need when you need it), and avoid being forced into expensive upgrades when limits are reached. They are also significantly less expensive to run.

* Encryption refers to the scrambling of data so that anyone trying to access it through unauthorised means will get nothing but a meaningless stream of ones and zeros. It's essentially a way of closing at least one type of 'back door' access to valuable and/or sensitive information.

WHAT MATTERS ABOUT SUPPLIERS?

With so many businesses embarking on digital transformation initiatives, and having to address the associated data storage, management and protection imperatives, the market in this area is very active and dynamic at the moment. This is good news in one way, in that many suppliers exist offering a range of different storage solutions and services, which means a lot of choice for the customer. The big question is how you evaluate what's on offer and make the right decision for your requirements. If your IT team has the necessary time and expertise, they can work through all of the considerations, and decide exactly what you need before engaging suppliers. If, however, like most smaller businesses, your IT team is short on the kind of in-depth knowledge required, then it can be useful to identify a reputable supplier who can help you crystallise your needs and select the kind of solution that will work best in your environment. If that sounds like a more practical approach for your business, here are some things to think about:

SUPPLIER FUNDAMENTALS



Scale, heritage and track record in SMB



New technologies are usually first sold into large enterprises, so beware of startups that are focused in this way. Look for suppliers who demonstrably understand the needs of SMBs.



Breadth of portfolio (unbiased perspective)



Single-product vendors often try to steer your attention towards needs that map onto their solution's capabilities. Suppliers with a broader portfolio can be more objective.

DELIVERY AND SUPPORT



Availability and capability of local partners



While a big brand name can provide reassurance, look for manufacturers who have an established partner network geared up to provide local support to businesses like yours.



Ability to help assess your needs and provide advice



Providing effective advice and guidance is not just about knowing the technology, it also requires a knowledge of best practice and an ability to empathise with your situation.

CONTRACT AND COMMERCIAL



Warranties and guarantees



A modern storage solution will be extremely future-proof, so you'll be using it for many years to come. The vendor must therefore contractually stand by its claims and promises.



Clear and flexible commercial options



A good vendor will offer financing, licencing, subscription and other options to spread costs and/or pay as you grow. Transparency is critical, however, whichever model is used.

That completes our whirlwind tour of the business of data storage. As a final thought, you're going to be busy enough over the next few years, so it's worth getting your storage onto a firm, future-proof footing now. You and your IT team will then have one less thing to worry about and distract you as you continue to drive towards your business goals and aspirations. We hope this guide has given you a feel for the things that really matter in this increasingly important area.

ABOUT FREEFORM DYNAMICS

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