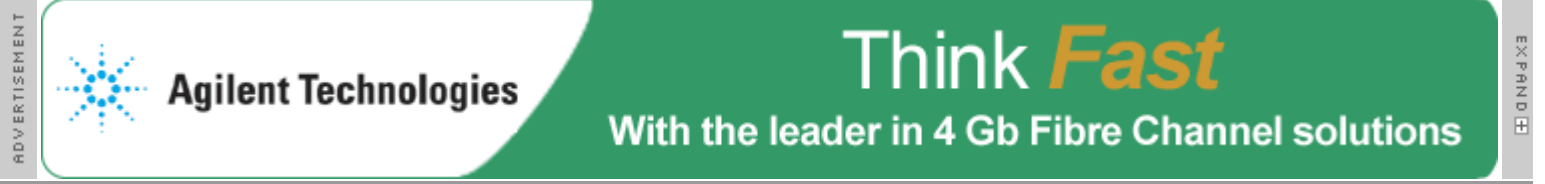


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User dumps Fibre Channel for ATA

By Jo Maitland, News Director
06 May 2004 | SearchStorage.com

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Web hosting and managed services provider Expedient found out recently that high-end Fibre Channel disks are not the be-all and end-all for mission-critical applications.

The company was so convinced by Nexsan's ATAboy ATA array that it migrated its customers off an EMC Symmetrix and over to the Nexsan system.

"We were skeptical but willing to test it and the performance was there," said Jonathan H. Rosenson, director of strategic initiatives at Expedient. The company mirrored its customer environments in a staging area and tested the read/write capabilities of the box using Lucent's Vitalsuite software and NetIQ tools. "We monitored the I/O on the Nexsan machines and didn't see any performance degradation," said Rosenson.

He concedes that the engineers did have to do some tweaking here and there to get the ATAboy to perform well enough to run Expedient's Oracle databases. Specifically, they had to change the default RAID 5 setting to RAID zero + 1 which uses more spindles and gives better write performance. "We are sacrificing capacity for a faster write performance," said Tom Locklin, systems engineer at Expedient.

Rosenson says the company has seen no failures yet but does expect the ATA disks to burn out more quickly than Fibre Channel disks. "But how quickly we don't know," he said.

In general Expedient isn't thrashing its current storage system as much it did with the EMC box. "We don't have nearly as many transactions on the new storage...we don't bang on it like we did before," said Locklin. But he qualifies, "No matter what you are doing, you always want your storage to be up."

Analysts said Expedient is a good example of a general trend in the industry toward rejecting high-end storage in favor of low-cost systems that are actually worth looking at.

Another key incentive to make the switch was cost. Expedient inherited the EMC Symmetrix when it acquired portions of Stargate, also an Internet Service Provider. Stargate was embroiled in a \$1.5 million lease for the Symmetrix which Expedient decided was too expensive.

The EMC lease was way too much, we

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Jon Rosenson
director of strategic
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At the time of the deal, Stargate was going through Chapter 11 bankruptcy and under the law it could renege on certain contracts in order to reorganize and re-emerge.

"The EMC lease was way too much and we knew we could find something more cost-effective," said Rosenson.

Back in the summer of 2000 when Stargate first bought its EMC Symmetrix system, it said this was really the only product around that could partition up disks for different applications as well as offer advanced remote replication features.



Since then Rosenson said there's a plethora of companies to choose from. Expedient looked at Network Appliance, Hewlett Packard and StorageTek before finally opting for Nexsan. The company needed a disk array it could carve up between its customers and its own internal needs. "We're running our CRM (customer relationship management) and billing applications on it, which are critical," said Rosenson. In addition to these applications Expedient has an ISP email system with about 20,000 customer accounts that's also running on Nexsan. Its total storage capacity right now is 5 terabytes and growing, the company said.

Aside from the expensive price tag for EMC gear, Rosenson said the footprint for an EMC Symmetrix was way too hefty. "EMC took up four to five racks whereas Nexsan was only half a rack ... When space is a commodity, something that's the size of a refrigerator doesn't cut it," Rosenson said.

Another consideration for Expedient was timing. It bought Stargate for its customer base and wanted the migration to a new system to happen as cleanly and as quickly as possible so as not to alarm its new customers. This required hands-on help from its chosen vendor.

"The only time we saw EMC was when the company showed up in a truck to collect its gear; Expedient was a very small customer for EMC and its support is not geared toward smaller customers," Rosenson said.

Switching to the new technology was not without a few bumps in the road. "Nexsan uses different commands to the EMC box, but the same methodology," according to Rosenson, which meant the company had to relearn some processes. He said Expedient migrated all of its internal systems over first before tackling customer data. "Our customers weren't too pleased they had to make a change," he said.

EMC declined to comment for this story.

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