

FEATURE ARTICLE

Redefining Virtual Reality: How Virtualization and Storage Technology is Leveling the Playing Field and Simplifying Banking

Today's community bank needs every advantage it can find to compete on a larger scale, ensure core stability and operate more efficiently with fewer resources. Virtualization of IT (consolidating multiple physical hardware and software resources into single virtual environments) is fast becoming an effective equalizer for many banks – when done right.

The Virtual Advantage

Banks have long been challenged by continually adding hardware and components to accommodate the needs of core processing and ancillary systems. The end result is often a hodge-podge of hardware and software overlays requiring constant individual attention and providing lackluster response, stability, security, and recovery capabilities.

Today's advancements in virtual operating systems can help banks not only consolidate and eliminate their current myriad of resources for greater savings and efficiency, but can also cost justify and deploy a virtual environment at a fraction of the cost with greater business recovery and availability.

However, it is important to approach the concept comprehensively, and with a knowledgeable core partner, for best results.

Comparing the Virtual Apples

Experts estimate that through 2010, virtualization will have the single largest impact on budgets for IT hardware and support. But as the concept of virtualization gains popularity, there is a growing number of vendors trying to cash in on the trend. As a result, there is a confusing array of offerings to implement, facilitate, organize, mitigate, and/or manage every perceived aspect of virtualization. Not surprisingly, the cacophony of approaches and terms can be overwhelming and at times misleading.

For example, the current concept of virtualization is frequently and incorrectly equated to the specifics of server virtualization – or more precisely, mainframe virtualization – used in the past. But virtualization today is not a “one-size fits all” concept, and can be applied to all IT resources, including servers, storage, networks and desktops.

It is also important to understand that virtualized environments are different from physically constrained environments. For example, the server relationship with the network increases in complexity as the number of resources virtualized in a single server environment increases. To best serve a bank's many business processes and users, the traditional method of allocating servers to a single process may not best achieve the goal of high utilization. In fact, a mix of processes running on a virtual server may more fully utilize the resources and spread usage more evenly over time. Furthermore, effective virtualization can replicate every server environment in real time, making it possible to move active processes to a replicated environment – instantaneously – with absolutely no disruption to users or customers.

The Virtual Vault

Effective virtualization is more than just consolidation. Virtual environments paired with an advanced, decoupled storage area network (SAN) can vastly better accommodate the growing data storage and backup needs of today's banks with access speed, replication, and de-duplication capabilities that far surpasses conventional storage technology. With right-sized connectivity, this pairing of virtualization and storage levels the playing field at a much lower cost per byte and offers flexibility and control not possible before, including near-instant business recovery and real time data and server replication at another data center or branch office.

This data vaulting eliminates the typical legacy solution of physical tape backup that is more expensive, manual, mechanical and time consuming to move tapes between offsite storage.

A bank of any size can easily and economically deploy a reputable, automated data vaulting service that eliminates human intervention and provides greater assurance that the data and systems are securely backed up and available at a moments notice.

The Virtual Bottom Line

Virtualization and storage advancements are leveling the playing field for banks of all sizes by reducing IT workload and expenditures as it creates more streamlined, stable operations with greater safeguards and speed, lower costs and a greener footprint. Combined with comprehensive data vaulting and storage-area networks (SAN) technologies, banks using virtualization can also benefit from near-instantaneous data backup, access and recovery.

Through proper due diligence, risk analysis and consultation with a knowledgeable, reputable core provider, a bank can select a cost effective approach to virtualization and storage with immediate enhancements to ROI, efficiency and long-term stability.

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