Mike Nelson – SV article

A Lunch Discussion about DR Solutions for VMware

While I was at regional VMware conference a while ago, I had the opportunity to sit down over lunch with some really smart I.T. folks and discuss their solutions for Disaster Recovery. While I have written a previous article on low cost and free solutions for DR, I wanted to find out what other shops were using now that there are even more options available than before. Here is some insight into that discussion and some products that are worth looking into and may suit your DR plan perfectly.

In basic terms of crafting a DR solution for a VMware environment, the final solution selected depends on several factors of what your specific situation is made up of. Most, if not all, solutions should involve some type of replication mechanism. The days of file copies and even tape backups are fast becoming outdated, while more advanced products that use Point-in-Time or Almost Real Time (sometimes referred to as Near Real Time or a variant thereof) replication are becoming more mainstream, more affordable, and can provide a complete solution better than ever before.

In our talk, a majority of the folks said that the [SRM (Site Recovery Manager)](#) product from VMware was too complex for their administrators and environments, and too expensive for their tight budgets (and thankfully there weren't any VMware reps at our table). While the pricing changes that VMware introduced in 2010 shows that they are attempting to warm up to the idea of selling it to smaller business, the product configuration is complicated to maintain for them. One thing that I have found in my own experiences is that vendors like VMware often "forget" when designing products is that in smaller companies, there most likely isn't a dedicated administrator for VMware, but rather just an all-around I.T. person who has been given it to manage. For that reason, they need to make things simple and easy, and the consensus was that other vendors have created products that are just that.

In our talks, there were several products that were discussed, with three of them being the most used in the group. These included [Quest Software's vReplicator](#) (now integrated into their vRanger product), [Veeam's Backup and Replication](#), and a newcomer to the product space, [Zerto's BC/DR for Enterprises](#). I personally have used vRanger and Veeam's products before, but not Zerto's. Zerto brings a complete DR solution to the table, whereas Quest and Veeam combine their Replication with a backup solution. Many of the people I spoke with that day really liked the combination offerings since it covered all their open bases rather than just DR. Although, the two folks that are customers of Zerto's preferred it (actually said they "loved" it) since it provided them with so much more flexibility with their DR scenarios and planning. As I mentioned before, since I have not used Zerto's solution, I will leave that review for another experienced writer to expand on, or possibly myself if I am lucky enough to give it a run through it's paces.

I mentioned that I really am impressed by the vRanger product (formerly Vizioncore's product bought by Quest) and have used it since its very early inception. In the latest release of version 5.3 of the product, Quest has added what I consider a very critical piece of innovation which is the ability to replicate virtual machines to multiple destinations, something that has not really been possible before without some serious (and sometimes expensive) configurations. This seemed to perk up some ears at the table and generated more discussion around some shops having to expand their Business Continuity Plans (BCP) to include probable secondary "cold" DR sites, such as branch offices, or using this feature to satisfy the need for backup machines to be spun up on a moment's notice in the central datacenter.

As we talked about the solution from Veeam, some of the users were still waiting for some features to be released at the time of our talks, just as they were for the vRanger product. But the Veeam product is already packed tight with features, and appears to have many more than vRanger. That brought up a small tangent of conversations around putting so much into a product that users only really use and know how to use about 20% of it. As of the writing of this article, Veeam has introduced version 6 of their product, which includes many of the enhancements that were talked about, including Hyper-V support and the use of multiple Data Movers (a fancy term for a proxy server). The Veeam release seems to coincide with the new release of vRanger and includes many similar feature changes that the two products share. So it appears that the competition between them is making even better and more feature-rich software for their customers, which is always a very good thing.

Needless to say, our lunch went from the event's allocated one hour to well over two hours of talking and most of us left the table with much more information, and even more questions, about our own DR solutions and how we could make them better. While all of us at the table already have DR architectures in place at our workplaces, I could not help but feel as we shook hands and walked away that some of those may be changing, and definitely changing for the better.