

VMware Backup Solutions for Small Business

Being an I.T. administrator for a small business usually means that you are a jack-of-all-trades. From answering the Helpdesk, which is usually your cellphone, to administrating the infrastructure, you pretty much cover all the bases and rely on vendor sales and engineer relationships to help you through the tough decisions and provide expertise. One area of your responsibilities that is crucial to the livelihood of the business is backup and recovery, and with that new VMware server implementation in place, it's time to look at how you can effectively backup those virtual guests just like you do with your physical servers today.

First, let's talk about what flavor of vSphere you're running. If you opted to deploy the "free" ESXi hypervisor in your server closet, you are very limited in not only backup choices, but also any sort of flexibility with vMotion or High Availability. That is not to say that it may not be a good fit for your business, as I have done this type of scenario for a few single entrepreneurs and self-employed folks that have smaller amounts of data that requires backup, and with a scripted or inexpensive online backup solution, it works well for them. Personally, I have struggled with a most of those situations though, since I feel that if your business is really that small, you probably don't need to be running a hypervisor anyways and should just rely on one or two physical servers with a stable tape or disk backup software solution.

A couple of years ago, VMware finally decided to truly recognize the small business market by offering their slimmed down ESX and ESXi product in what is called vEssentials, but you probably already know that since you bought it, right? In the past, they had something called the "Foundation" package, which was similar in concept, but nowhere near similar in pricing and support. vEssentials comes in two flavors, vEssentials and vEssentials Plus. The Plus package gets you a few more add-on products at a higher price tag, and one of those is their Data Recovery product (formerly VCB – VMware Consolidated Backup). Another "add-on" is one that I truly believe that VMware should offer for free, and I still have not heard a solid technical argument why they won't, is vMotion (i.e. vCenter). The maximum server/socket count is the same, and the price tags are about \$3k apart so the cost justification comes down to how much flexibility you need. It's also good to keep in mind that many 3rd party products, should you ever add on in the future, do require vCenter to function, as they do not (or cannot) talk directly to the hypervisor itself.

If you have the Plus package, I highly recommend you try out the Data Recovery solution that is provided. While it is still an improving product, it may be a solid solution for your small guest count environment. If you find that it is lacking for your needs, I would then move on to testing a solution provided by such companies as [Veeam](#), [PHDVirtual](#), or [Quest](#). The products that they offer a robust and scalable to meet just about any need, and are fairly priced for the small business.

Some of the things you should consider in your evaluations are the stability, flexibility, support, and administration aspects of the solution. A basic PowerShell or Perl scripting implementation may be just right for you, at almost no additional cost, and can be completely tailored for your needs. Another consideration may be that your current OS backup software may already support the backup of your virtual machines. Companies like [CommVault](#) and [Symantec](#) offer agent solutions to do just that. There are definite advantages to consider having your OS and VMware backup all in the same solution.

If you still need more, take a look at Data Recovery product or any of the partner products I mentioned in this article, as well as taking a good read on a [companion article I wrote awhile back](#) or any of the excellent TechTarget articles written on the subject. Everything considered, it's what is right for you and your small business environment that matters and will make you feel safe about the backup of your data.