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HP VLS6500

OVERALL RATINGS

Installation		Installation couldn't be simpler
Manageability/Configuration		Management is as simple as the installation
Operation/Functionality		We had no problem with any of the product's functions, but the unit lacks some functionality of other VTLs
Recoverability		Recovery is simple for anyone familiar with tape-operating procedures
Problem Resolution and Support		HP support was responsive and knowledgeable, although we didn't need much.
Interoperability		No back-end tape library means data must be moved twice but simplifies operation. HP has the added plus of an inquiry string recognized by Symantec NetBackup.
User Level		Suitable for entry-level storage administrators
List Price as Tested	\$68,450	

Scale: 1 flame = poor; 2 flames = fair; 3 flames = satisfactory; 4 flames = very good; 5 flames = excellent

User level: ● = novice; ■ = intermediate; ◆ = advanced; ◆◆ = experts only

PRODUCT SUMMARY

It's hard to imagine a simpler-to-use virtual tape library (VLT) than the HP VLS6500. The HP VLS unit can be installed and configured in less than an hour, excluding time needed to rack the unit. Entry level IT personnel are unlikely to have difficulty implementing and managing this unit, and it may be a good solution for remote locations and branch offices where IT professionals are not always available.

The VLS6500 hardware configuration includes HP's Proliant server with Red Hat Linux and StorageWorks SATA-based storage arrays (MSA 20 in the system we evaluated). HP has wrapped this system with its own user interface, documentation and support. The system uses a keyboard-video-mouse (K-V-M) installation sequence for local systems but can also be installed using an integrated lights out (iLO) feature or a VLS discovery tool for remote systems. Configuring the virtual library, tape drives and media is intuitive and simple. In fact, the temptation is to make assumptions and cut corners. However, HP's documentation is generally thorough, and users will actually save time by following the directions and avoiding false assumptions. (We made a wrong assumption regarding the barcode naming convention for the virtual media and had to redo that step of the process.) Our only complaint with the installation and documentation was that the power-on sequence was not in the hardware installation guide but rather in the user guide; we wasted a bit of time looking for it.

The corollary to simpler use is usually simpler functionality, and this holds true for the VLS, as well. Some of the advanced functionality, such as nonredundant data storage and hardware compression found in other units, is not available in the VLS (software compression is available, but may result in processing overhead). However, we think that HP has correctly identified the key functionality that organizations will use most. Moreover, this is not to say that VLS does not have some "secret sauce" of its own.

One of the more interesting features of VLS is its "Firesafe" tape "vaulting." This is not true vaulting in the sense that tapes (or even data) are migrated from the library. Instead, the virtual

media is marked as vaulted and becomes unavailable to the backup software. This assures that the virtual media element cannot be overwritten. To retrieve the information, the Firesafe media is simply "imported" back into the library

The VLS systems do not support directly connected physical tape systems. IT organizations will direct one backup job to the VLS and other backup jobs to physical tape for long-term retention or offsite vaulting or both. This architecture simplifies operation and assures that all backup/recovery (B/R) control is retained by the B/R application software. It will not be possible to get the backup catalog and the VTL unsynchronized as it is when the B/R software and VTL maintain their own catalogs. Of course, this means that data must be moved

About the Review

Diogenes Analytical Laboratories and SearchStorage.com teamed together to create disk-to-disk buyer's guidelines that help IT buyers differentiate between products and select the best candidates for their own situation. For this report, we took 13 different products into the lab and ran them through their paces. We compared products based on ease-of-use, manageability, features/functions and technical support systems. Our opinions are based on the experience of more than a decade of implementing and managing data protection systems.

twice, but this will be a problem only in organizations whose backup servers are near capacity. The issue can be resolved with a larger or additional backup server.

Day-to-day administration of the VLS virtual tape library is significantly less than a physical tape library. Obviously, physical media does not need to be moved. Furthermore, there is no need to coordinate barcodes between virtual and physical because the B/R software will track and map the barcodes. Administrators mainly will need to assure that virtual media is expired at a rate sufficient to main disk-space equilibrium and to generally assure that the unit does not run out of space. Administrators will also want to balance virtual tape drives across Fibre Channel ports to assure optimum throughput.

DIFFERENTIATING FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

FEATURE/FUNCTION	DESCRIPTION
<i>Simple Use</i>	<i>This is the simplest VTL we have tested. Time from uncrating the unit to the first byte of backed-up data was less than an hour. Because the unit is a VTL, users will have minimal (if any) modification of their existing operating environment. The product is designed to be failsafe, and its architecture achieved that objective. System configuration is both easy and flexible.</i>
<i>Comprehensive GUI</i>	<i>Much of the unit's simplicity can be credited to the quality of the GUI. We found it to be intuitive with a help system that was not only useful but inclusive. The GUI has four major functional categories: identity, system, notification and help. Although a 275-page User Guide is provided in a PDF document, we didn't use it much because of the quality and search ability of the help system.</i>
<i>"Firesafe" media</i>	<i>Media elements can be protected from overwriting by a virtual vaulting feature called Firesafe. Although this is not an additional layer of data protection (the data never leaves the virtual library,) it is a safeguard against operational errors.</i>

BUYER GUIDANCE

Kudos:

HP has designed a system that will meet the preponderance of user needs, and it is wrapped in a simple-to-use package. After installation and media expiration policies are established, the unit will be largely “set and forget” with only occasional administrative effort. Quality support and documentation help to assure that when users do have problems, they will be able to recover quickly.

Caveat:

Because the system is so easy to use, IT buyers should not expect the same level of functionality that more complex systems deliver. Specifically, the unit does not have non-redundant storage, hardware compression or data replication between systems.

Who should consider this product:

IT organizations looking for VTL functionality usable even by entry level personnel will want to consider the VLS system. Because of its remote management capabilities, VLS is also a solid candidate for remote locations and branch offices.

ABOUT DIOGENES ANALYTICAL LABORATORIES, INC

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