

Inside Perspective

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Do you have a storage strategy? (Part 2: MEDITECH ISB)

Jim Fitzgerald, Chief Technology Officer

In our last installment of this mini-series on storage strategy, we examined the changing needs of HCIS with regards to data scalability and performance. The expanding scope and the growing clinical importance of a reliable online electronic health record (EHR) has led MEDITECH to embrace SAN technology as a means of helping customers secure, protect, and recover their data.

In today's episode, we'll look more closely at MEDITECH's Integrated Serverless Backup (ISB). Not so much in terms of how—which we have beaten to death in prior articles (the last one being Issue 12 in June)—but more in terms of why.

Since ISB's announcement in June, 2003, at the MIX CIO Forum, I have been, let's say, underwhelmed, by the reaction of the MEDITECH customer community. Even the early adopters of SAN solutions have not been in much of a hurry to embrace this watermark technology. Eighteen months since announcement, by my non-scientific guesstimation, somewhat fewer than 30 MEDITECH-centric facilities have adopted this terrific improvement in how data is backed up and managed.

In pondering this particular paradox wrapped in enigma, some thoughts emerge, and I found my paranoid IT manager (PITMA) personality arm wrestling my visionary technologist (VITO) persona. (Folks, you do not want to grow up to be me!)

We join these two personality fragments on their 2nd cup of coffee on a Monday morning...

VITO: Yo PITS! When we gettin' ISB? We been changin' tapes every morning for 17 years! Isn't it about time we joined da twenty-foist century?

PITMA: Listen, VITO, money doesn't grow on trees. I barely got the SAN we needed for MAGIC OSAL in the door, with a little help on the capital budget side from Radiology, who's getting ready to pull the trigger on PACS and quintuple our annual disk consumption. I mean, thank The Big Guy that MEDITECH and PACS systems play well together on a common SAN, or we would have been...well, whatever. The point is that we can't afford to fix what's not broken, and MEDITECH backup isn't broken—in fact it's probably the most simple and reliable backup we have now.

VITO: Yeah, boss, I'll give youse dat, but I just wonder how long we'll even be able to get standalone servers with external SCSI tape drives. And man, have you seen what those resynchs do to our nightly CPU and SAN utilization? It's off the freakin' charts! It's a good thing we don't do much business overnight, or the nurses would be down here quicker than a lawyer with a dent in his Lexus.

PITMA: Look, VITO, I see where you're coming from, but man, new software, a backup server, a tape library of some kind...I don't know if I can get them by Dick, the CFO.

VITO: No problem, I'll just forward the phone to Dick when Doctor So-and-So is all hot because gettin' his results is like a 3-hour wait on a tape restore instead'a reverse-establishmentating a disk image. Some guys can't see the darn city for the parking meters!

PITMA: You're not going to let this one go, are you?

VITO: You know I only got our best interests at heart, PITS. You need to spend more time with your kids an' all. Besides, the medical staff is all big on these advanced clinicals. I sure don't want to be the one to explain to them what it takes to do a full re-load the old way.

...And then, fortunately, I snapped out of it.

VITO has a point. ISB is not something you want to do reactively. It may seem hard to justify until you actually encounter a problem, but it is the core of both backup and disaster-recovery strategies for MEDITECH going forward.

Consider the tremendous technical effort that has gone into assuring that MEDITECH can properly manage BCVs or Snapshots for each of the five SAN technologies they support from three different vendors. It's time to take a closer look.

Next Time: Integrated Disaster Recovery (IDR).

Jim Fitzgerald is our CTO. He's an Irish Catholic kid from Roslindale, married to a nice Italian Catholic girl who spent some of her childhood in Revere. If you lived around here, you'd understand. He welcomes your thoughts and comments. Reach him at editor@jjwild.com.

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