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Case Study

NetApp AFF (All Flash FAS)

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Review by a Real User
Verified by IT Central Station

What is our primary use case?

Currently, we are leveraging AFF for our VMware environment solution. So, we use it as a storage for our customers and are leveraging it to provide a faster storage solution for VMware customers.

We are using it for block level based only storage, as of today.

How has it helped my organization?

With AFF, the benefit is that we have 27 data centers across the country, we are able to standardize across all them and do storage replication. The simplicity of being able to offload cold data to StorageGRID with the tiering layers that NetApp provides, this just makes it easier for us to be able to reduce labor hours, operations, and time wasted trying to figure out moving data. The simplicity of tiering is a big bonus for us.

In terms of data protection, we have been leveraging SnapMirror with Snapshot to be able to do cloning. For the simplicity, we find it is able to do SnapMirror on a DR site in a disaster situation so we can recover and the speed to recovery is much more efficient. We find it much easier than what other vendors have done in the past. For us, to be able to do a SnapMirror a volume and restore immediately with a few comments, we find it more effective to use.

AFF has helped us in terms of performance, taking Snapshots, and being able to do cloning. We had a huge struggle with our backup system doing snapshots at the VM level. Using AFF, it has given us the flexibility to take a Snapshot

more quickly.

What is most valuable?

The most valuable features are dedupe, compression, compaction, and the flexibility to offload your cold data to StorageGRID. This is biggest key point which drove our whole move to the NetApp AFF solution.

AFF has opened our eyes in a different light of how storage value works. In the past, we looked at it more as just a container where we could just dump our customer dBms and let the customers use it in terms of efficiency. Today, to be able to replicate that data to a different location, use that data to recover your environment or be able to have the flexibility with the solution and data. These are things which piqued our interest. It's something that we're willing to provide as a solution to our customers.

What needs improvement?

We are looking at Cloud Volume today.
We would like to be able to have on-prem VMs that can just be pushed o the cloud, making that transition very seamless in a situation where you are low on capacity and need to push a VM to the cloud, then bring it back. Seamless transition is something that we really would enjoy.

What do I think about the stability of the solution?

Stability has so far met all our requirements. We are leveraging pretty well. We haven't really had many issues.

We struggled a bit in the beginning. But with the support of NetApp, we were able to upgrade to new firmware which helped us become more effective and stable for almost a month now. So, it's pretty good.

What do I think about the scalability of the solution?

Scalability is the most effective way that we have seen so far from NetApp to be able to add additional disks. The ability to leverage the efficiency has also given us the flexibility to integrate it as one solution. Scalability is working for us. As demand grows, NetApp has been supporting it.

How are customer service and technical support?

I would rate the support as an eight (out of 10).

Customer service is one area of the product line where I would love to see improvement. I have had several vendor experiences with NetApp where I faced challenges in the initial call trying to navigate the requirements of the service level expectation. Their response could be better

improved. However, the final result is great. It is just the initial support level where improvement would help to effectively solve problems.

Which solution did I use previously and why did I switch?

Initially, we were working with EMC VNX devices. But as life kicks in, we were looking for a long-term solution and what our roadmap was in terms of storage aspects. We saw the true benefit in terms of cost as well as the efficiency to be able to leverage storage. We found AFF to be a better fit for our use case.

We had the Dell EMC product line for a long time in terms of portfolio and different options of gears. We looked at NetApp gears and capabilities, not just the storage component. However, the capability of being able to go beyond the storage, as a software-defined solution is something that attracted us to NetApp. It is a fit all solution for now.

In our previous storage, we were doing a lot of roadmapping and giving customers a certain amount of storage. Whether customers used or allocated it, it was sitting in there. With the AFF thin provisioning, it has given us the benefit of being able to reduce our footprint from four arrays to a single 2U array. So, we are able to leverage efficiency and virtual volumes with thin provisioning. This gives us almost three to four times more storage efficiency.

How was the initial setup?

The initial setup was pretty smooth because NetApp came onsite with their support. They gave us the option to send a technician onsite to do the whole cabling. We were part of the architecting of the whole design, in terms of how we wanted to leverage our data lift and be able to leverage how we want to take control of the data. With their support and being able to set it up through the OnCommand System, it was not a lot of clicks. The initial setup was pretty straightforward. From the expectations that we had and the simplicity of setting it up, it wasn't so complex.

So far, we only have rolled it out in one of our data center heavily. We tested it out, and it's working well. We have put a lot of production workload into it. Our next target is to roll it out across all the data centers. We are hoping to save almost 30 to 40 percent of our footprint initially. That would be a big savings for us.

What about the implementation team?

I am doing the whole migration for the solution.

What was our ROI?

AFF has given us the ability basically to reduce the amount of time that we are spending on OnCommand. What we have been able to do now is leverage in VSC, which has given us the

simplicity to be able to provision data store from within the vSphere environment: provision and deprovision. Now, we can give more options to our users to provision their storage as well, there is less of a footprint for storage admins. They can now focus doing more automation rather than just doing the day-to-day work.

Which other solutions did I evaluate?

Comparing it to other vendors, there was more complexity when leveraging the features with the cost of the features available today, based on where the roadmap is. NetApp seems to fit our requirements for now.

What other advice do I have?

I would rate the product as a 10 (out of 10), but the whole package including the support would be a nine (out of 10).

Cold data tiering to cloud is something that we're looking at today. Right now, we're more focused on StorageGRID and being able to do everything on-prem. However, we are looking at Cloud Volumes to leverage for the immediate term use case and how we could leverage a quick turnaround to the market for our customers' needs.

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