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Hitachi Data Systems taking storage to the cloud

Enterprise and Mass-Market Hosting

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To deliver on its promise of an agile cloud strategy for large corporations, storage specialist **Hitachi Data Systems (HDS)** continues to flesh out its product portfolio. HDS recently unveiled two new offerings that help new and existing customers embrace both the private and public cloud. First, the Hitachi Cloud Service for private file tiering (PFT), which is designed to help customers embrace cloud-like services for managing unstructured data, but within the safe confines of their own four walls. The second offering is public cloud storage, which helps third-party service providers build public or hybrid storage clouds aimed at consumers and SMBs. It uses software from SaaS storage specialist **Digi-Data** as well.

Private file tiering and public cloud storage

Private file tiering: A key component of the fully managed Hitachi Cloud Service Suite, aiming at midsize to large enterprises struggling with the management, storage and cost of vast amounts of unstructured data (business docs, PACS information, video and Web content). The key is to have the file tiering offering installed (by HDS services) as a tier behind the existing primary file-storage tier (e.g., NAS filer), automatically migrating older or seldom-accessed data to the more cost-effective HCP tier.

With third-party storage clouds being perceived as too risky, Hitachi hopes to fill the breach with an offering that combines the Hitachi Content Platform (HCP) – HDS's object-storage platform, running on its modular **AMS** storage system – and policy-based data-movement software (from **CommVault**) with its remote storage management services, thereby creating a fully HDS-managed service (managed from Hitachi's system operations center) behind the corporate firewalls. HDS embraces the utility-based pricing model for the private file tiering service. Aside from a one-time setup fee, customers pay only for what they consume (beyond an agreed minimum) with zero capex investments. The service is billed on a monthly basis for a choice of pre-defined resources, offered at 50TB, 200TB and 500 TB increments over a 3-year period. Geographically speaking, private file tiering service is a global service offering, leveraging its global operations centers for service management. HDS will have the full general availability for private file tiering in this quarter.

Public cloud storage: A product bundle aimed at service providers looking to target consumers and SMBs – telcos, systems integrators and other service providers – with cloud-based storage-as-a-service (SaaS) offerings. Here, HDS has teamed up with Digi-Data, with a combined offering that pairs HDS storage hardware with Digi-Data's multifunction storage-services platform. The combined offering does carry key features that matter most to service providers for service enablement. Service features include metering capability, billing system integration and APIs. HDS is quite serious about being a cloud storage enabler. To that end, the company offers a set of technologies such as Web portal integration, single sign-on and e-commerce capabilities that facilitate a faster service rollout. Specific SaaS applications that HDS/Digi-Data will be seeking to enable include Mac/PC backup, Internet PC hard drive, data/media sharing and mobile application support. Digi-Data has been inducted into HDS's technical appliance partner program, although there is go-to-market integration allowing HDS's sales force to sell the Digi-Data platform.

Competition heating up

A big focus of HDS's message is to let customers move at their own pace, which HDS hopes will stand out from rival cloud offerings it claims foist too much disruption and risk on end users. This is, in part, a thinly veiled attack on the major public clouds, such as **Amazon Web Services**, although it won't have escaped HDS's attention that **Microsoft** has just announced on-premises and partner-hosted versions of its Azure PaaS offering in league with **Dell**, **Fujitsu** and **Hewlett-Packard**. Additionally, HDS will be aiming private file tiering at **NetApp** shops in particular, claiming that it can help lower the cost of on-premises NAS by 25-33% by migrating seldom-accessed data to its own archive tier.

HDS is also looking to differentiate itself from major rivals such as **EMC**, which is also targeting the private cloud in particular, through efforts such as its **Atmos** cloud storage system, the VCE coalition. Although EMC is also promoting a collaborative approach – it has formed **Acadia** to deliver build-operate-transfer services around VCE vBlock implementations – HDS claims these are still essentially rip-and-replace offerings that inevitably involve some level of disruption for customers. It counters that offerings such as PFT are designed to work with, not against, incumbent infrastructure and processes.

Meanwhile, other cloud storage specialists are increasingly working to lower the barriers to entry for end users. For example, **Nirvanix** recently unveiled hNode, a fully managed on-premises hybrid cloud storage offering aimed at large file-oriented data types. The hNode offering starts at 200TB, but is expandable to petabytes per location, according to Nirvanix. Here also, HDS's partnership with Digi-Data should allow it to compete more effectively for service-provider contracts with the likes of Nirvanix, whose customers include telcos **Verizon** and **Swisscom**.

It is worth stating that most large storage vendors are now aggressively targeting the service provider segment, as are a few cloud storage software providers such as **Mezeo Software**, through technology partnerships. Mezeo's new partner program, dubbed Mezeo Ready, is a deliberate effort to enable quick deployment of Mezeo-powered cloud storage offerings leveraging a robust vendor ecosystem.

T1R take

HDS' zero capex private file tiering should provide the cost benefit to migrating mid-tier and large corporations. Besides the obvious 'pay as you go' consumption model, and the modular design, the remote storage management capability helps close the gap of complex storage management in the virtualized environment. Although HDS is taking a conservative approach while capitalizing on enterprise opportunities, the specialist appears to be in synch with key success elements such as agility and flexibility in its cloud storage play.

Up until now, hosting providers and telecom operators have made massive investments in infrastructure, while watching returns dwindle due to intense price competition and product cannibalization. Offering compelling value-added services is the key to survival in this market, and partnering with an established cloud enabler is one way by which hosters and telecom providers can weather the storm of competition. Innovations from HDS to provide technologies targeting third-party service providers including telecom providers, cable operators, and pure-play hosters is a savvy play. With all the building blocks they need, third-party providers can build cloud storage – either on its own or in combination with cloud compute services – to drive new growth opportunities. T1R expects to see a number of HDS -enabled public cloud storage announcements in the coming months.

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