

Enterprise Backup Solutions (for the Mac)

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When it comes to backup products for the Apple Mac, you only really get three options: EMC's Retrospect, Archiware's PresStore and BakBone's Netvault. I have spent the last couple of months evaluating this software for use in an enterprise scale environment and have chosen PresStore as my backup product of choice. Why? Well configuration can be complicated and the licenses can be expensive, but the performance and reliability of this software is very impressive indeed. Although I found the configuration to be unusually complicated and convoluted in comparison to Retrospect and Netvault (it is a steep learning curve), once it is setup the software is easy to use and incredibly powerful.

Whilst both Retrospect and Netvault both use control software on a dedicated server for configuration and scripting, PresStore is controlled entirely from a web based interface which allows the user to access configuration and backups from anywhere on the internet. In fact it also allows you to back up thin clients over the internet using compression as well as the more traditional local network. The web interface looks a little old fashioned (some would say even OS9 themed) but it is both logical and intuitive.

Using a Quantum Superloader 3 (LTO-3) connected to an Intel Xserve, the speed of backup is truly phenomenal, however you can back up to disk if you prefer which is obviously even quicker.

Restoring data is fantastically easy and incredibly quick. PresStore uses a shopping cart type queue system for restoring data and I have yet to see a better and more natural approach to the recovery of data. You can even set access rights to users so that they may restore data from their own user areas themselves for several generations of backup, and this is without any higher intervention. PresStore also allows you to backup data on Windows and Unix/Linux based servers/workstations which further extends the usefulness of the product and this feature cannot be ignored.

Retrospect on the other hand has a very nice Aqua interface which is more familiar to OSX desktop users. The way in which catalogues are created and the way data is stored is slightly more intuitive but unfortunately the software has a number of problems. Firstly, EMC has announced that it is to cease development on Retrospect in the near future (but will continue technical support on the product line) which is not something an enterprise level organisation is going to be happy to adopt. Secondly, the reliability of the backups leaves somewhat to be desired. Repeatedly during my tests, backups had failed overnight for little good reason and we all know that backups NEED to run correctly every night without issue in order to keep the data safe.

Finally, Netvault is a high quality product which is reliable and fast. The major issues with NetVault seem to be related to the counter-intuitive working of the software. The interface and terminology used is in many cases different from typical backup software and this makes setting up and configuring the product very confusing. There is nothing wrong with NetVault as a backup product, but I just did not like the feel of it as it seemed unnatural to use.

Anyone who is considering a serious backup solution for the Mac should ideally try out these three options in the environment it is intended for. With the release of OSX 10.5 and the integrated Timemachine backup, data loss in the workplace should hopefully become a much rarer event.

PresStore - www.archiware.com

Retrospect - www.emcinsignia.com

NetVault - www.bakbone.com