

Is There a Future for Optical?

VAR Wins \$76,000 E-Mail Optical Archive Project

This company expects to grow 20% by providing optical-based e-mail archive solutions to the financial and medical verticals.

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There's no future selling optical archival storage solutions — that's what some disk-based backup and archive vendors have said recently. Paul Greene, president of Data Archive Corporation (DAC), quietly disagrees. After all, if his competition thinks optical storage is a dead technology, it frees up the market for Greene's company to make more sales. Not only has Greene based his entire business model on optical archive solutions, he will increase sales 20% this year by selling only optical archive solutions. That sounds like a lot of opportunity.

DAC loosely falls into the VAR and systems integrator categories, but Greene says the company is really a data archive specialist with a focus on regulatory compliance. The firm specializes in the finance and medical vertical markets — two that are heavily regulated.

Recently, DAC provided an e-mail archive solution for a New York-based brokerage firm. As an SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission)-regulated entity, the brokerage firm's primary goals were to comply with various SEC regulations and to have adequate disaster recovery capabilities.

The brokerage firm needed a solution that allowed it to efficiently and cost-effectively store, archive, find, and retrieve e-mail messages and other data. For SEC compliance, the solution had to include WORM (write once, read many) media, data accessibility, and the ability to store multiple copies at both primary and secondary locations. For disaster recovery, the solution needed to provide the IT staff with an automated means of quickly backing up data for off-site storage. The solution also had to provide audit trails for the legal discovery process, if required.

Seize Regulatory Compliance Opportunities

Information contained in e-mail messages is a major part of a corporation's intellectual property. E-mail messages between brokers, dealers, and their customers are an excellent example of records that fall under SEC Rule 17 a-4. The SEC sent the industry a clear message in 2002 when it fined five companies over \$8 million for failing to retain e-mail messages and produce them for regulatory investigations. The SEC also has mandates covering disaster recovery planning.

To help achieve compliance with SEC Rule 240.17 a-4(f), which outlines SEC regulations regarding management of and access to electronic records, the brokerage firm looked to DAC for a solution. DAC recommended a Plasmon G-Series Library with Data Director data management software from Qstar Technologies and Enterprise Vault for Microsoft Exchange e-mail archive software from KVS. The total solution cost approximately \$76,000. It provides e-mail archive capabilities, a viable e-mail disaster recovery plan, and e-mail message audit trails, which are imperative during the discovery phase of lawsuits.

According to DAC's Greene, the G-Series allowed the brokerage firm to select a library with the storage capacity it needed today with an upgrade path to 3 TB of data in the future. "We looked at magneto-optical technology from another vendor, but went with Plasmon because of its hot swap drives, which maximize the accessibility of the data," says Greene.

Optical technology provides some strong arguments for archive solutions. Its 50-year data shelf life, high tolerance for environmental conditions, ease of use, and noninvasive nature make it a great choice for e-mail archive systems. Before you dig a grave for optical technology, you may want to reexamine the archival value of optical storage for your customers.