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Breece Hill & Pals Unveil App

Breece Hill, Abrevity, and QStar have collaborated on an appliance they say will fit the needs of many organizations seeking easy-to-implement ILM. (See [Companies Intro ATS App](#).)

The ATS appliance (short for Automated Tiered Storage), combines one of the only disk-to-disk-to-tape systems remaining on the market -- Breece Hill's iStoRA -- with Abrevity's FileData Classifier software and QStar's HSM software package. The result, the vendors claim, is a one-stop-shop for classifying files automatically through metadata and moving them, via policies, between the disk and tape systems integrated in the single-disk iStoRA box.

This is more than a packaging exercise, the suppliers insist. While Breece Hill resellers bundle iStoRA and the vendor's other wares with software from BakBone, CA, CommVault, EMC, Microsoft, and Veritas, this is the first time Breece Hill has supported a data classification package -- Abrevity. What's more, Abrevity had to write new software to combine its product with QStar's. As a result, ATS now sports an Abrevity interface that works with the logical volumes and other functions created by QStar HSM specifically for the iStoRA unit.

So far, the ATS is available only through Breece Hill reseller [Atria Data Systems](#), a Santa Clara, Calif.-based OEM specializing in ILM implementations. The product is scheduled for general availability through other Breece Hill channels by the end of this year or the start of 2007.

None of the vendors involved can produce a single customer to discuss their use of ATS, though the vendors say several are currently beta testing it.

Support for ATS will come from the channels, with Breece Hill and Abrevity adding secondary hardware and software support, respectively, as needed. ATS will cost \$49,875, which includes 3.2 Tbytes of RAID 5 disk, a Windows-based NAS, and an LTO3 tape drive with a 10-cartridge autoloader.

ATS sits in the data path and can be work alone or with SAN and NAS gear from the likes of EMC, HP, and NetApp. It will be able to handle 3 Tbytes of data, or about 200 files, via the Abrevity-based software interface.

So what's not to love? Maybe nothing, if you're an SMB looking for a shortcut to ILM for your data files. Though all of the vendors involved argue that ATS will fit companies of all sizes and can be incrementally upgraded to handle bigger configurations, the smallness of the basic unit and its limit of handling 3 Tbytes makes it a neat fit for companies that may not already have more sophisticated, tiered storage setups.

"This is a great SMB solution for environments that don't need nearline storage," says Mitchell Moody, VP of sales at Atria Data Systems. He also thinks it's a solid option for creating "intelligent secondary storage" for data that needs to be specially handled in divisions or departments due to regulatory mandates. "This allows you to easily move data to a platform that is accountable," he notes.

Of course, there are lots of other ILM products out there. But at least one analyst thinks there's a value in the particular combination ATS offers. "There are lots of tiered storage products, but you must do the data classification yourself or use a separate package for that," says Dan Tanner, founder of the ProgresSmart consultancy. "Or, you can use data classification products and pick your own tiered storage." Having both together is "interesting," he says.

At least one storage consumer who does not use ATS thinks there's a potential drawback in using either disk or tape for tiered storage. "Our second tier is typically not tape," says Bob Mason, CTO of Spanish-language newspaper firm [ImpreMedia](#) and former director of publishing systems at The Dallas Morning News. (See [Dallas Morning News](#).)

While ILM is key to ImpreMedia's strategy, the performance issues of tape, and the decreasing cost of disk make Fibre Channel-to-SATA a preferred approach to tiering, Mason says. "It's almost as cost effective to move to a second tier disk than to tape," he notes. "Then again, maybe some people don't need to retrieve data at high speed."

Breece Hill, Abrevity, and QStar aren't put off by any such nay-saying. Touting the still-lower cost of tape versus disk, the companies are enthusiastic about their appliance approach and plan to work out other iterations.

For example, Breece Hill is "in discussions" with email archiving vendors for an appliance that also would incorporate software from Abrevity and Qstar, according to Steve Scott, vice president of engineering at the company. The companies may announce something within the next few weeks, he says.