

WHY NAS?

A Guide to Understanding Network-Attached
Storage for Owners and Operators
of Small to Medium-Sized Businesses



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Why NAS – A Guide to Understanding Network-Attached Storage (NAS)

As the owner or operator of a small to medium-sized business, there are unique challenges and concerns that you address on an everyday basis. In addition to being in charge of daily operations, you probably have a hand in everything from client service to human resources to accounting. These are traditional business functions that most of us are familiar with, so executing them shouldn't pose too great of a challenge, right? But what about information technology? IT has grown tremendously in importance as a business function over the past decade, yet it is still the one that average businesspeople know least about. IT is often touted as an enterprise-level concept - a sophisticated, expensive, high-tech business advantage that should only be of concern to Fortune 1000 companies. But its importance to small and medium-sized businesses cannot be overstated. Every document ever created or received by your staff, whether it be an office memo, customer database, inventory log, or client correspondence, must be safely stored and easily accessible at all times. Imagine not having access to your data. What would the impact be on overall productivity? Or imagine losing that data entirely. The importance of implementing a network infrastructure that supports your business 24x7 becomes increasingly clear.

So you're smart enough to know that data, and the successful management of that data, is critical to the success of your business. But for those of us who don't have a technical background or specialized training, the task of building and maintaining a network infrastructure can seem rather daunting. Smaller companies also cannot afford the luxury of outsourcing the task to an IT specialist. So what is the solution for small to medium-sized businesses that require a simple, reliable and cost-effective way to manage their data? A network-attached storage (NAS) system. Whether you have 5 employees or 50, a NAS solution will keep your mission-critical data safe, and enable your staff to share files quickly and reliably for maximum levels of productivity.

In order to understand the value of a NAS system, it is first important to understand what it's designed to address: data storage. Data storage is probably the most ubiquitous concept in the world of technology. As a businessperson, you are directly or indirectly dealing with data storage everyday – when you're accessing a file, running a software application, e-mailing a colleague, or drafting a memo. As your business grows, so does the amount of data you generate. If you don't have enough storage capacity to handle that data, you will inevitably slow down your network, and as a result, lower your productivity. In the business world, seconds tick by like hours, and time is money. Chances are that you've experienced the frustration that occurs while waiting for a file to open. It's also likely that you run a variety of software applications as part of your business, and that you've experienced slowdowns with them as well.

These problems are probably occurring for two reasons: 1) You have a lot of data being shared from workstation to workstation; and 2) There is a lack of storage space on

your server. By installing a NAS system, you can drastically increase the speed of your network so you no longer experience the downtime, frustration, and lost productivity and profitability that results from insufficient data storage. NAS systems are completely dedicated to storage, making them the best solution for improving the speed and functionality of your network. NAS relocates the storage onto its own independent platform, effectively separating file sharing from application serving. Since applications and storage are no longer running on the same system, this frees up file server bandwidth and reduces overhead on existing application servers. The result? Applications are processed more quickly and efficiently, and your staff has fast and reliable access to data - both to the benefit of your bottom line.

In addition to accessibility, NAS also offers high levels of reliability. Almost all NAS systems incorporate a feature called RAID (redundant arrays of independent disks). A system with RAID capability can protect and provide immediate access to data, despite a single disk failure or concurrent disk failures. Different levels of RAID offer different levels of protection. With RAID 0, data is striped across all physical drives to improve access times. With RAID 1, the second set of drives duplicates the information from the first set for maximum data protection. RAID 5 distributes data and parity across all drives and is capable of tolerating the loss of one drive, providing full drive integrity.

As a small to medium-sized business owner, cross-platform file sharing is also an area of importance to you. Your current infrastructure, like those of many businesses, may contain a mix of Windows, Windows NT, Apple Macintosh, Novell Netware, UNIX, and Linux platforms. Traditionally, sharing data across these different platforms can be both challenging and expensive. The good news is that with a NAS system, cross-platform sharing becomes quite simple. On the network, a NAS system can appear like a native file server to each of its different clients. That means that files are saved on the NAS system, as well as retrieved from the NAS system, in their native file formats. So you don't have to worry about converting your entire office to one single platform, or losing your initial investment in your desktops, servers and workstations.

Another key benefit of network-attached storage lies in its simplicity. NAS systems are incredibly easy to install. This is great news for today's small to medium-sized businesses, which have neither the budget nor the daily need for an IT manager. Technological enhancements to your network should not be difficult or require significant time or effort from your staff. Today's NAS systems are out of the box, plug and play. They are up and running in minutes – about the same time it takes to program a VCR. Nor does installation require high levels of technical skill or a background in computer science. Any user, regardless of experience level, can create networked storage within five minutes and two mouse clicks with minimal effort. Not only are NAS systems easy to set up, but they are also easy to use. Intuitive software programs guide you in managing your network and getting the most out of your NAS system. Again, they are designed with simplicity in mind.

Two Ways to Deploy Simple NAS



Network-attached storage is also an attractive option for small to medium-sized businesses due to its cost. In any business, it is important that dollars spent result in dollars earned. The proposed benefits of implementing a new technology must be carefully evaluated to determine whether the investment will justify itself in the long run. Expanding your servers is not a cost-effective way to increase storage capacity. Implementing a NAS system is. NAS, by virtue of being a single repository completely dedicated to storage, is simply the smartest investment for ensuring the integrity, reliability, and accessibility of your data. For a few thousand dollars, today's NAS systems offer the same performance, reliability and feature sets that enterprises pay \$10,000 or more for.

The above factors present a strong case to small to medium-sized businesses that are looking a simple and cost-effective way to experience what today's global enterprises are benefiting from: sophisticated technology; fast, reliable network access; productivity increases; and the peace of mind that comes with knowing that your mission-critical data is safe. No matter how you look at it, NAS systems are simply the best way for you to safeguard, manage and leverage the information that is the foundation of your business.

About FIA, Inc.

Headquartered in San Clemente, California, FIA, Inc. develops and markets an innovative line of network-attached storage (NAS) servers. The Company's proprietary NAS technologies deliver the high levels of performance, availability, and reliability demanded by today's information-centric economy. FIA is a wholly owned subsidiary of WBL Corporation, a billion dollar organization that is ranked among the top 100 companies by market capitalization on the Singapore Exchange Securities Trading Limited (SGX-ST). Additional information about FIA can be found by visiting the company's web site at <http://www.fiainc.net>.