

REPORT REPRINT

Actifio Global Manager centralizes data management on-premises and in the cloud

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Since it pioneered the copy data management market in 2009, the company has worked to expand the capabilities of its data copy virtualization platform to include hybrid cloud as well as data protection as a service. Actifio Global Manager is a key feature to pull all those resources together.

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Actifio's new technology, Actifio Global Manager (AGM), adds a centrally managed, Web-scale approach to copy data virtualization (CDV), providing access control and management capabilities that now span on-premises, hybrid and public cloud-based Actifio data environments. The company's platform offers a common-sense approach to managing the data sprawl found in firms that need to create protected and time-sensitive data sets for test, dev, compliance or analytical purposes.

THE 451 TAKE

One of the key industry focuses today lies in reducing the cost of storage, and Actifio's CDV platform offers the reduction of data copies overall, while the AGM product now provides common tools for controlling data sprawl across on-premises and hybrid cloud environments - a challenge that will become more common as the adoption of cloud storage options continues to grow. The management of data copies was a greater issue in the past for big companies with substantial test/dev requirements, but Actifio's move to offer on-demand and unified data storage and protection options on-premises and in the cloud makes CDV technology much more accessible to customers of every size.

CONTEXT

Founded in 2009, Actifio was the first company to specifically address the problem of data copies, and has since defined the market and gained \$207.5m in VC funding based on a \$1.1bn valuation. It currently has about 350 employees, with plans to increase this year, and lists some key logos as customers: IBM, HBO, Netflix, Symantec, Accenture, NEC, Kohler, Unilever, Royal Bank of Canada, Samsung, Avis, Dassault Systèmes and the US Air Force.

Actifio has been substantially expanding its cloud presence as well, through partnerships with IBM, Dell, AWS, Google, Time Warner Cable, Verizon and Sungard. It has also been looking to build a more international presence, and claims its customer base is close to being 50:50 between North American and international markets. Plus, it has had success establishing Actifio in the Japanese market, which can be difficult for US companies to enter.

Although Actifio's initial success was with big enterprise customers that regularly struggled with numerous copies of large data sets for test, dev and other purposes, those same capabilities also translate well for MSPs that can use Actifio's CDV platform to manage their own multi-tenant data environments, as well as provide those same features to their downstream customers in the form of a SaaS offering.

This - combined with the growing popularity of Actifio's platform as a SaaS offering for hosted disaster recovery/business continuity (DR/BC) and cloud data protection - has allowed Actifio to shift its client base further downstream. It now claims over 1,200 customers, with approximately a 50:50 mix between enterprise and smaller customers. The average deal size for large customers remains about \$300,000 to \$350,000, but it didn't disclose specific numbers on its Actifio Sky virtual platform and Actifio One cloud-based offering.

TECHNOLOGY

Actifio was early to recognize the problem that excessive data copies can cause in large-scale environments, and developed its CDV platform to give customers a way to get control of the redundant data problem. In essence, Actifio's CDV appliance generates a non-disruptive, parallel (golden copy) data set matching the primary data being protected. However, it is based on an object storage core that monitors ongoing changes, and allows a customer to dynamically construct any number of virtual, duplicate or custom data sets on demand.

As the primary production data changes, Actifio builds a continuous record of those changes using Actifio Connectors, which gives it the ability to non-disruptively track changes and incorporate them to meet customer requirements. Any virtual copy data sets needed are then hosted from the Actifio appliance without the need to utilize production storage. The granular capabilities offered by Actifio's metadata environment provide immediate, self-service, role-based access to copy data sets, and support data masking as well as automated data refresh and policy-based lifecycle management capabilities.

Simply reducing the costs of managing and hosting multiple data copies alone can be worth the price of admission for large data customers, but Actifio's rich metadata environment also enables the creation of on-demand custom data sets ideal for analytics, compliance, legal and data-protection use cases, which should appeal to customers of any size.

The data from applications protected by Actifio is continually monitored and updated, and the metadata environment allows Actifio to be used in the context of data protection and SLA delivery as well as copy management, because the same technology used to create copy data sets can also be used to track application-level performance and restore data to a production environment in the event of primary storage failure. Actifio's platform supports block-level, native data in VMware, Oracle, Windows, Linux, HP-UX and AIX environments, and provides application-level support for SQL Server, MS Exchange, Oracle and SAP production environments.

PRODUCTS

The heart of Actifio's CDV environment is the Copy Data Storage (CDS) appliance, which serves as the host platform for gathering the 'golden copy' of all the data that a customer wishes to host. It also creates and manages the necessary metadata and provides access to the virtual copy data on demand. The CDS is available as either on-premises physical or cloud-hosted virtual appliances, and Actifio assists the customer in scaling the CDV infrastructure to match the specific applications, data volumes and performance needs of their production environment.

The physical CDV is a dedicated server appliance offering Fibre Channel and Ethernet connectivity, and must be matched with either existing storage capacity or Actifio-supplied storage hardware capable of supporting the initial golden copy plus anticipated growth. Actifio's CDV platform offers de-duplication and compression, and supports the Actifio Virtual Data Pipeline technology, which serves as the high-performance transport mechanism between all forms of enterprise storage, and provides instant access to virtual data sets as well as low-impact, synchronous/asynchronous data transport between appliances.

Actifio's Sky virtual CDS product offers the same features in the cloud, and virtual CDS instances can be scaled on demand to meet changing operational requirements for cloud-based workloads. In February 2015, Actifio launched Actifio One, a SaaS offering to provide business resiliency for midrange customers on a subscription basis.

Actifio's new AGM product serves as a unified management platform, tying together any on-premises, hybrid and public cloud-based Actifio data environments within a single pane of glass. AGM provides complete visibility over all facets of its CDV platform, handling capacity management, load balancing and resource allocation of physical and virtual CDS instances – either directly using its own management interface, or from within other management platforms via its RESTful API.

COMPETITION

As the first company to specifically target the problems with data copies, Actifio competes in the copy data management space against targeted companies like Catalogic and Delphix. But when presented as a primary data-protection strategy, Actifio is in direct competition with practically every storage and backup vendor across the board. Veritas has made statements claiming that copy data management isn't really a replacement for traditional backup – a sentiment shared by many other backup vendors – but Actifio maintains that its data-protection model actually exceeds the capabilities of traditional backup.

There is no right and wrong at this point, and the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Copy data management (virtualization) can provide a number of new options for DR/BC applications due to its more granular and dynamic data management capabilities, plus CDV offers the ability to randomly access and restore data sets far more rapidly than traditional backup.

We believe that CDV technology like Actifio's will push traditional backup vendors like EMC, Veritas and CommVault to provide some form of copy data management capabilities as part of their platforms. Conversely, Actifio will need to refine its offering to compete with a growing number of DRaaS vendors like Barracuda, Axcient, Unitrends and Datto, which are looking to fill the DR/BC gap for midrange and low-end business customers.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

Actifio can typically show immediate cost savings for customers that have little or no data management automation in place. Beyond that, Actifio's flexible data-protection, indexing and policy-based automation capabilities can be a real value-add for managing future data growth.

WEAKNESSES

Actifio is a relatively new entrant in the DR/BC and data-protection space, and it lacks market recognition in the face of growing competition from new DRaaS and cloud-based data-protection offerings.

OPPORTUNITIES

Actifio's new AGM technology is a valuable tool for companies looking to build out a hybrid cloud environment, or those that need to manage storage across on-premises and cloud-based resources.

THREATS

Many of the high-level management capabilities enabled by Actifio's underlying metadata architecture could likely be duplicated by other players, so Actifio will need to keep ahead of both high-end storage vendors and startups that will try to capitalize on a market segment that Actifio created.