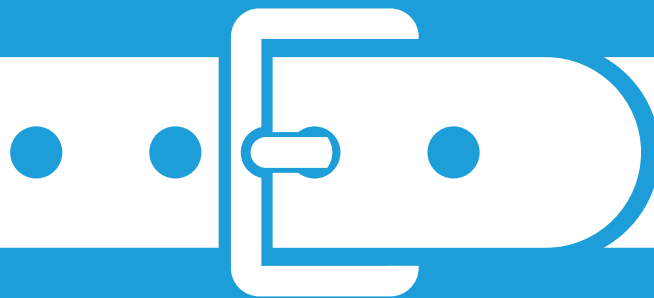# Belts and Braces!

Developing a greater understanding of IT Administrator needs in the Backup and DR space

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CEO

It's been a big year for Macrium Software. We've invested heavily in our sales and marketing teams to help us bring Macrium Reflect to an even wider audience, and been working on developing our channel go-to-market strategy. Most importantly, we've released the latest version of Macrium Reflect to rave reviews in the marketplace, and our customers tell us we have the fastest restore available.

Our customers and prospective customers are at the forefront of all we do. We conducted this research to hear straight from the horse's mouth – what do they want out of a backup and DR solution?

Almost 500 respondents filled in our research survey, which covered their biggest headaches with backup and DR, how they manage their backups and what would be featured in their perfect solution. There have been some interesting results come out of the survey, providing thought provoking insights into the dynamics of this market. There is a real fear of backup failure that suppliers need to address, and ease of use is cited continuously as the most desirable solution feature. We were also very pleased with the resounding positive endorsement we got from the respondents about our products and support.

We hope you find the following survey results of interest. At Macrium we pride ourselves on producing an excellent product that our customers trust to 'save their bacon' whenever disaster strikes.

Nick Sills, CEO, Macrium Software

> There is a real fear of backup failure that suppliers need to address, and ease of use is cited continuously as the most desirable solution feature.

Macrium Software was founded in 2006 when Nick experienced a personal data disaster, and in the process discovered existing backup tools were not as good as he expected. Wanting a software solution that was practical and easy to use, Nick and his team developed Macrium Reflect to create a safe and secure disk image with ultra-fast recovery times should disaster strike.

INTRODUCTION

Macrium decided to carry out a survey for two major reasons. The first was to receive feedback from our customers who had moved to our latest product and pass that back to the development team. The second was to test some of the assumptions and themes that we think characterise our customer base and the backup market in general. We received almost 500 responses by the time the data for this report was collated. We were delighted with the global level of responses and engagement, it far exceeded our expectations!

SPEED. RELIABILITY. COMPATIBILITY.

Speed, Reliability, Compatibility: these are recurring words that respondents used in praise of their current backup solution. For those respondents that indicated they were using our software, the feedback was very encouraging, indicating that we perform very well against these criteria. Quite a few provided background indicating that they had moved from solutions that were slow, complex and unreliable. The busy IT Administrator cannot afford to waste time on a solution that is complex and unreliable, but needs an easy to configure solution that quickly provides fast backups.

> I found it worked flawlessly when I upgraded two of our computers to Windows 10. The updates arrived prior to the conversion. Had to take one back to Win 8.1 twice before obtained good install of Windows 10. Worked without a hitch each time. Like new enhancements to set up full/incremental when I went to Windows 10.

The launch of Windows 10 and the prospect of losing data after going through the upgrade process drove many customers to look for a backup solution that was compatible with Windows 10. Previous experience of Windows systems upgrades has driven people to look for solutions that are known to work with Windows 10.

> Layout, Design, User-friendly, Concise descriptions on functions/actions; minimal tech mumbo jumbo.

A dilemma for designers of backup solutions aimed at the IT Administrator, is to simplify the solution without completely removing the opportunity for the technical professional to add value. Any features that assist the IT Administrator to save time are appreciated. However, they will quickly see through any attempt to include features that may sound great in the marketing material, but add no value to the critical task of data protection.

> Powerful, robust and far advanced because of its simplicity i.e. very easy and straightforward to use. Dependable, reliable.

OVER 50% USING MORE THAN ONE BACKUP SUPPLIER

Confirming previous assumptions it was found that over 50% of those surveyed use more than one backup supplier, with 16% using three or more backup solutions. In our experience IT Administrators are happy to use niche solutions for their needs and it's not an issue for them to manage multiple vendors' products.
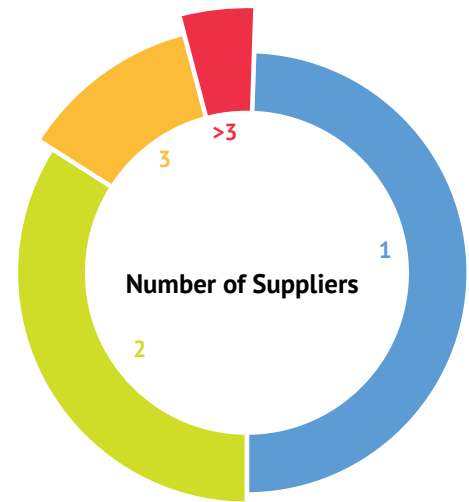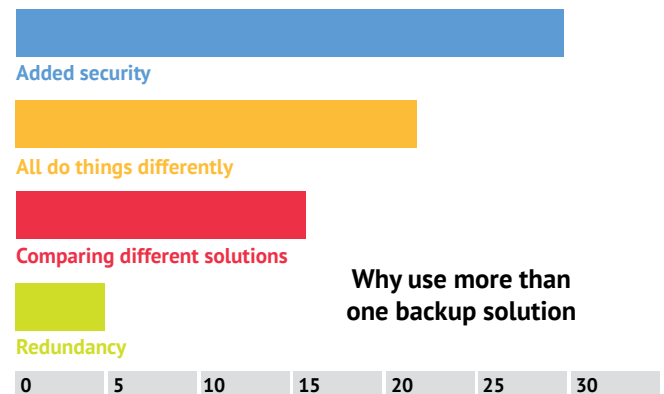
FIGURE 1
Graph showing number of backup solutions that respondents say they use.

Number of Suppliers

HOLDING UP THEIR BACKUP AND DR WITH BELTS AND BRACES

These findings raise the question, why are they using more than one backup solution? Surely a single solution is preferred to lower administration overhead? In this case it's important that the IT Administrator has the right tool for the job and different software will fulfil different needs. Clearly there is tolerance for the administrative overhead so long as the solution is trustworthy. When reflecting on the results from this question, and comparing to feedback on their current supplier, it becomes clear that so long as a solution is fast, reliable and easy to use, that is more important than having a single 'one size fits all' solution. Niche backup solutions are not a problem.

It seems that peace of mind comes before reducing administrative workload.

Added security

All do things differently

Comparing different solutions

Redundancy

Why use more than one backup solution

| 0 | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 | 30 |

FIGURE 2
Reasons for having more than one backup solution.

By far the most important reason for using more than one product was the added security of having extra backup solutions in place. As seen in Figure 2 above, 30% of those surveyed mentioned this; mostly as a failsafe in case one backup fails and they are unable to get their data back. There was a real lack of trust in the backup solutions available in the marketplace. In our experience this is due to a long history of overpromise and under delivering, and features that do not properly address the core needs of the IT Administrator. The future is about gaining trust and building honest solutions that deliver on the most important feature: a reliable backup which can be recovered quickly and easily if required.

My experience (over 30 years) with backup software and other solutions is that there are none that are totally reliable. Therefore it is wise to have several backup solutions to my backup concerns.

The great phrase, a 'belts and suspenders' approach was cited often. An interesting question is whether this is IT Administrators being overly cautious or acting on lessons learned? The individual's personal experience shapes their views on this and it is understandable that previous bad experiences will drive the IT Administrator to take the 'safety first' approach.

With so many different solutions available in the marketplace, it's no surprise that 22% mentioned that all the solutions do different things and that they have various favourite features. Many users like to try out different solutions to find the right one for them, which is why in many cases, they will have several different solutions in place across multiple machines.

> They do different things, differently. And when budgets are very tight, one has to use several free tiers and products to get decent overall protection and functionality...

TIME TAKEN TO DO BACKUPS CITED AS BIGGEST HEADACHE

When asked what they regarded as the biggest issue with backups and what causes them the largest headaches, the respondents chose time as the biggest problem (22% of those surveyed). This includes the time to set up, schedule and ensure that all backups are running successfully.

FIGURE 3
The top five issues with managing backups.

The other main concern is whether the backup will actually be successful. The most important part of the backup process and yet throughout the survey, an area which obviously causes many respondents to reach for the aspirin! Vendor and solution track record for reliability is very important and a trustworthy solution will quickly gain a loyal following.

The time to do backups

Will it work?

Complexity

Biggest headaches with backup and DR

Remember to set backups

Storage space

| 0 | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 |

> Checking whether backup has worked (especially problematic for files and subfolders below the first level of the folder being backed up). Deciding what to delete, what to archive, and when, if ever, to erase old backup disks. Determining whether a folder has any data.
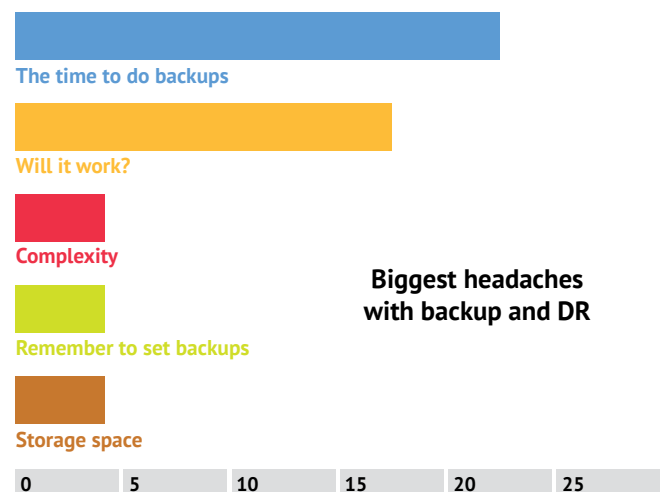
Related to this is the requirement to actually test the restore to ensure it has been successful. IT Administrators that now build into their data protection plans regular testing for recoverability, are saving themselves a lot of potential problems when they need to recover quickly!

> A backup solution is only as good as the restore. It is difficult for home users to actually make the decision or have the "spare" equipment to perform a backup and then test the restore process.

> The lack of an easy and completely certain way of testing an OS backup without restoring it at the risk of destroying the current OS.

One thing many suppliers appear to be guilty of, is making the software too complex for the general user. This includes the software itself as well as the documentation. It however appears to be a fine line as the more technical users do not like to have their software 'dumbed down'. As is fairly common in the IT world, terminology and the language used is often twisted to what the vendor wants to emphasize, causing confusion for IT Administrators when using some solutions.

> Understanding the vendor's vocabulary, especially when more than one task appears to accomplish the same basic thing.

CONFUSION IN THE MARKETPLACE!

When asked what their optimal way to backup data was, we found that a significant number of respondents were confused by the question; either not understanding the terminology or were unaware of the different approaches that are available for data backup. This is perhaps surprising as data backup tools have been around for a long time and the question included terminology that is commonly used to describe backup options. On the other hand perhaps we should not have been surprised because when we were writing the new knowledge base material for Macrium Reflect v6 we had to clarify for ourselves what each approach meant!

To assist users and the public alike in understanding these different options to backup data we created some simple and popular animations that are available on YouTube at the following locations.
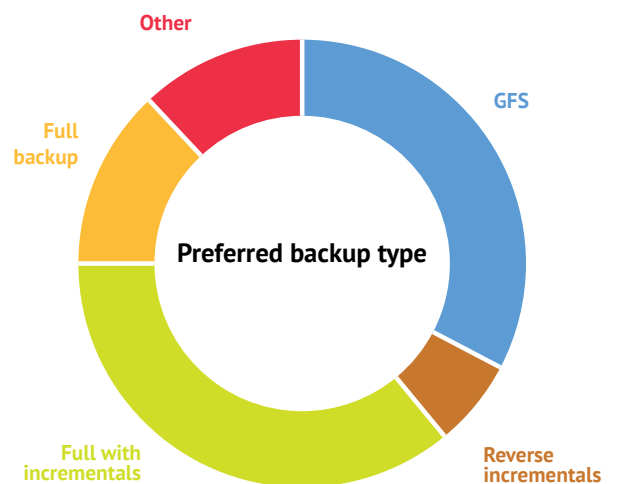
Synthetic Full
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aeWSmT2TP0
Incremental Forever
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hhne4HHTKs
GFS Custom Retention
www.youtube.com/watch?v=yE1bDUZlXa0

> **FIGURE 4**
> Respondents' preferred backup strategy.

CLONING, IMAGING AND BACKUP?

Other comments made include cloning of disk, full disk mirror and just incrementals on their own. We found that people get confused when trying to decide between cloning, or imaging, or file and folder backups. In our view they are all valid backup approaches and describe the process that is chosen to gain a backup.

THE HOLY GRAIL OF BACKUP AND RECOVERY

With over 23% of respondents stating that their perfect solution would be easy to use and understand; it comes back to that central theme of trying to develop a solution that appeals to both the highly technical market and also those who wish to have their solution more feature rich with documentation and an interface that meets their needs. The following quote is typical of what was received.

> If I was designing Backup Software, I would make it as quick, easy, and painless as possible.

> A simple one button system which automatically backs up. Something like the way antivirus works.

The idea of a hassle free solution pops up again as many wish to have a solution that allows one click backup. Of course this is more difficult in practice because what is one person's idea of "simple" is anothers of inflexibility and lock down!

> Providing a one-click repetition of a formerly chosen backup modus.

One person even anticipated the release of our viBoot tool by suggesting instant virtualization as a way of checking if systems can be recovered from backups. We hear you and agree!

> I would like a "virtual recovery" feature to allow one to go through all the motions of recovery without actually altering anything. It would allow one to have the confidence that a "real recovery" would be successful.

For IT Administrators who have a large number of systems to backup; speed and reliability are paramount. It is impossible to guarantee 100% reliability because of the number of variables that could affect a backup. However, ensuring that reporting on the process, providing detailed logs on events during backup and the verification after completion are all critical for the IT Administrator.

CONCLUSIONS

What can we conclude from our survey results? Firstly, we can be sure that our customers are watching what we do given the very strong response to the survey! Secondly, we can be happy with the overwhelmingly positive feedback we received, and whilst this was not an objective of the survey, the fantastic comments reflect very well on the team.

Perhaps the most surprising conclusion from the survey is that IT Administrators prioritise the right tool for the job above minimising the number of backup tools in the enterprise. It is not a problem for niche backup tools to work alongside large framework solutions, and the perceived administrative overhead tolerated to provide peace of mind.

Reliability, ease of use, speed and simplicity are the four most desirable features in a backup tool. Some respondents want extreme simplification, whilst needing rich reporting on backup success or failure.

The confusion over the terminology of backup and what it means was a little surprising to us. However, we have taken this on board and in the future will be providing clear supporting documentation.

We want to say a huge thank you to all those who took the time to answer the survey questions. Be assured that your feedback continues to drive our product development plans to meet your needs.

Macriumsoftware