Special to SearchStorage.com

Tributary Systems, Inc. VITAL

OVERALL RATINGS

Installation	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥	TSI and its support organization take care of installation and configuration.
Manageability/Configuration	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥	The configuration wizard makes VTL setup a snap.
Operation/Functionality	🔥🔥🔥🔥	The unit is full-featured, with the exception of disk-load balancing and non-redundant storage (data de-duplication).
Recoverability	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥	Recovery worked efficiently, but the unit does not support automated failover.
Problem Resolution and Support	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥	The one-button support feature was the best support mechanism of any product we reviewed.
Interoperability	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥	Works with any SQL database. The unit supports HP Nonstop and Open Systems environments.
User Level	■	Requires a storage administrator with an average level of experience.
List Price as Tested	$79,000	Price will vary by supplier and hardware configuration.

Scale: 1 flame = poor; 2 flames = fair; 3 flames = satisfactory; 4 flames = very good; 5 flames = excellent

User level: ● = novice; ■ = intermediate; ◆ = advanced; ◆ ◆ = experts only

PRODUCT SUMMARY

Tributary Systems, Inc., (TSI) may not be a household name in the storage industry, but we think their Virtual Integrated Tape and Library (VITAL) product may be the "sleeper" system of the disk-to-disk backup product category. We'll confess to some skepticism at the outset of our evaluation. But after using the product, we walked away believing that the VITAL product was a definite "short-list candidate." If IT buyers can get beyond the notion of brand name, they'll discover a virtual tape library (VTL) product that offers robust functionality, solid operation, and the best support mechanism of any product we reviewed. VITAL is TSI's version of Gresham's SCP product, used as our test platform.

VITAL is a virtual tape library built on a Linux kernel with MySQL as the database, although TSI supports the product with any SQL-based database. The VITAL server supports iSCSI, SCSI and Fibre Channel disk arrays. Initial installation is performed by TSI, The VITAL server (dual Opteron system with 4GB RAM for the test) connects to a back-end tape library, which in our case was a Sun L700; the product also supports ACS/LS. We used a Sun/StorageTek 680 disk array and CA's BrightStor ARCserve version 11.1 backup and recovery software.

The GUI includes a configuration wizard that creates the VTL with virtual tape drives and media, in addition to configuring the backend tape library. After we finished this task, we created the virtual media based on the physical media of the L700. With the VTL and virtual tapes created, configuring the backup server was a snap. Using Microsoft's iSCSI initiator, ARCserve immediately recognized and configured them.

One of the features that we like about VITAL is its flexibility in using virtual and physical media. VITAL has its own media manager, but it does not supplant the backup software's media manager. The backup software can eject the virtual media, at which point VITAL will copy the data to physical tape. Thus, the chance of the backup catalog getting out of sync is unlikely, and physical tapes can be recovered with or without VITAL involvement.

About the Award

Diogenes Analytical Laboratories and SearchStorage.com teamed together to create disk-to-disk buyer's guidelines that help IT buyers differentiate between products and select the best candidates for their own situation. For this report, we took 13 different products into the lab and ran them through their paces. We compared products based on ease-of-use, manageability, features/functions and technical support systems. Our opinions are based on more than a decade of implementing and managing data protection systems.

System management and maintenance are other positive areas for VITAL. We found the reporting capabilities of the unit to be quite complete. The unit includes threshold reports and alerts, as well as problem reporting via both e-mail and SNMP. Reported errors include those issued by the physical tape library, drives and media. The function we like best, however, is the product's "one button support" feature. One-button support rolls up all of the log files and configuration information into a compressed file, then e-mails it to TSI's support group. Thus, the support team will have all of the diagnostic information they need without the customer jumping through hoops.

The only real deficiency that we could note with VITAL is a lack of disk-load balancing. Without this feature, it is possible to experience I/O

contention when backup jobs compete for the same resource. Even so, VITAL has a number of desirable features, including disk compression and encryption on the virtual media. Data can be replicated by cascading VITAL servers, but this does not extend to automated failover between units; the company has indicated that load balancing and failover will be supported in a future release. Expansion disk and physical tape libraries can be done on-the-fly, making for simple upgrades. When the logo on the cabinet is the greatest shortcoming, you know you have a solid product.

DIFFERENTIATING FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

FEATURE/FUNCTION	DESCRIPTION
"One-button" Support	*With a single command, VITAL will roll up all log and configuration files into a single compressed file and will e-mail it to TSI's technical support group.*
Breadth of Functionality	*VITAL addresses a sweet spot of functionality and usability. This is not to say that the unit has every feature on the planet, but it does have comprehensive VTL functionality, solid operations, complete reporting and innovative support mechanisms*
Broad Platform Support	*On the operating platform side, VITAL supports all open systems environments plus HP's Non-stop. On the tape side, the product supports a variety of libraries in both direct-connect and ACS/LS environments as back-end devices.*

BUYER GUIDANCE

Kudos:

The VITAL product has no glaring deficiencies. It is easy to operate and does not permit operations that can result in unrecoverable states. VITAL is a no-nonsense unit that will offer a quality experience from out of the box to daily operation and technical support.

Caveat:

Our only beef with VITAL is that it does not support disk load balancing. It also does not offer de-duplication as some other products do, although it does have disk compression and encryption.

Who should consider this product:

VITAL is a data center-oriented product that the typical IT staff will have little difficulty implementing and operating. Organizations that are looking for a "best of breed" VTL will want to include VITAL on their short list.

ABOUT DIOGENES ANALYTICAL LABORATORIES, INC

Diogenes Analytical Laboratories, Inc. is an independent organization dedicated to helping Information Technology buyers reduce the inherent risk and uncertainty associated with technology purchases. Our goal is to create an informed I.T. consumer and provide the complete information needed to make smart purchase decisions. This report is based on Diogenes Analytical Laboratories' actual lab testing experiences and was not funded, sponsored or commissioned by any vendor. The opinions expressed in this report are those of Diogenes Analytical laboratories, Inc.

Diogenes offers a full range of services for IT buyers. These include:

- **In-depth product evaluations and comparisons**
- **Comparative Buyer's Guides**
- **RFP generation and review**
- **Head-to-head in-lab "bake-offs" for product finalists**
- **ROI and TCO analysis**
- **Advisory services**

For more information, go to www.diogeneslab.com or call 303-402-9900.

This report was not funded, sponsored or commissioned by any vendor. Diogenes is an independent testing lab that does not endorse products. Nothing in this report should be construed as an endorsement of any product or technology for any purpose.