OCTOBER 2024

NetApp Delivers Block Storage Performance and Simplicity With New ASA Lineup

Simon Robinson, Principal Analyst

Overview

At its annual INSIGHT customer conference in Las Vegas, NetApp announced a new family of all-flash ASA systems. The NetApp ASA A-Series storage systems are designed to deliver high-performance block storage in a simplified and affordable manner for customers looking to modernize their storage environment supporting critical enterprise applications such as virtualized workloads and databases.

Analysis

With nine in ten organizations reporting that their IT environment has become more complex over the past two years, the pressure to simplify IT has never been stronger.[1] This complexity is particularly apparent at the infrastructure level, where IT operations professionals continue to grapple with a range of challenges that can stand in the way of modernization efforts. Indeed, in a recent study from TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group, 68% of respondents agreed that infrastructure complexity was slowing down digital initiatives.[2]

The storage domain can be particularly culpable. Block-based SAN storage still plays a critical role in supporting virtualized applications and high-performance transactional workloads such as databases and analytics, but many organizations still struggle with what could be considered the basics—for example, ensuring there's enough performance (e.g. low-latency IOPS) to meet demanding application needs, having the time needed to provision new capacity, skill shortages, hardware costs, and a lack of comprehensive management with other components of the infrastructure stack (see Figure 1).[3]

In an era where demands on the infrastructure to be both performant and simple to manage have never been greater, it's not surprising that many organizations are taking another look at their block storage environments and asking whether their current solution is fit for purpose in the modern era.

For those that do choose to modernize, the benefits can be substantial. It comes as little surprise then that 91% of organizations said data center modernization is a strategic initiative that can lead to competitive differentiation. Meanwhile, cited benefits associated with all-flash storage adoption include improved application performance, improved TCO, and simplified management.[4]

---

[1] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Complete Survey Results, *2024 Technology Spending Intentions Survey*, February 2024.
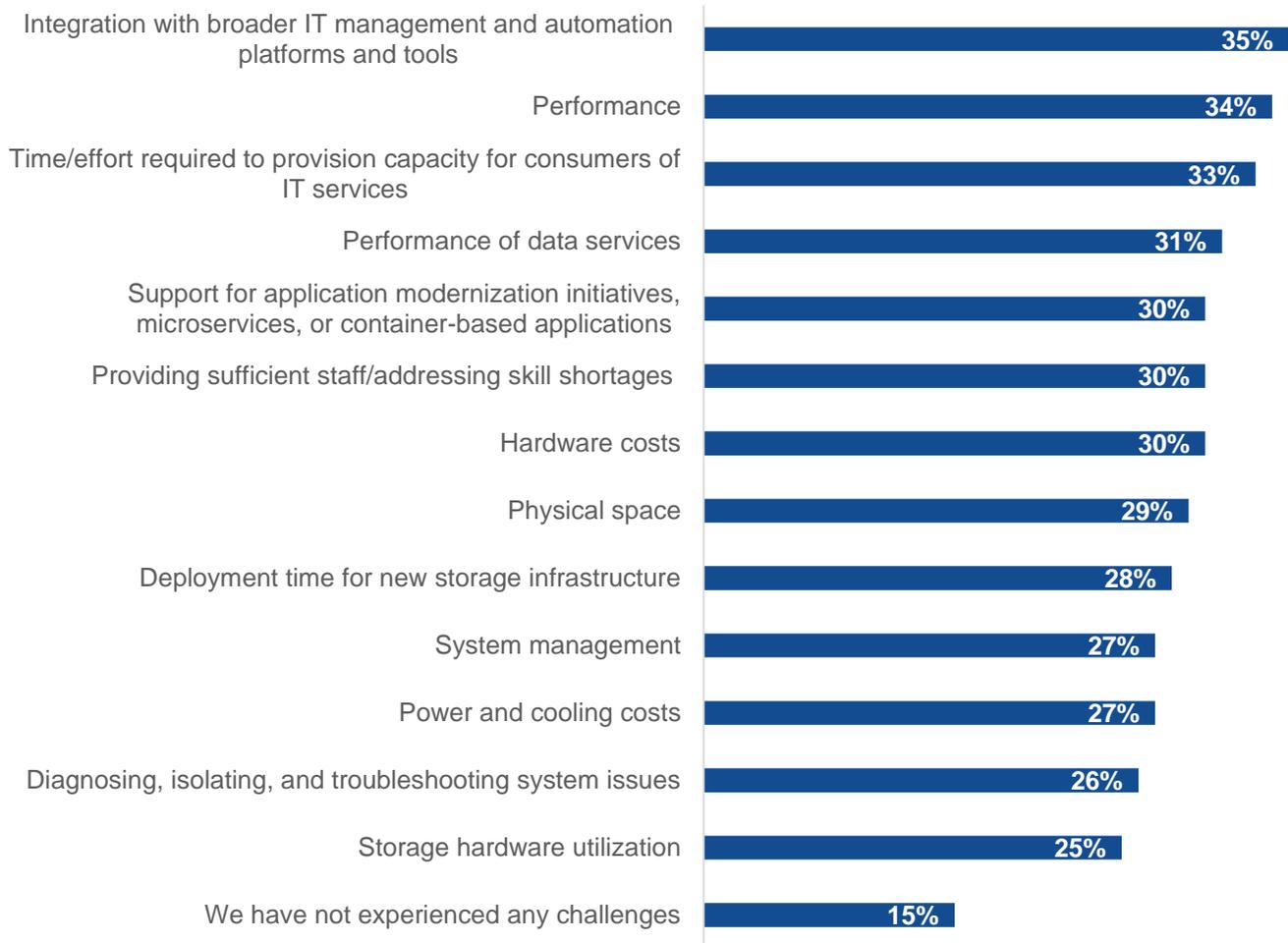[2] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *Navigating the Cloud and AI Revolution: The State of Enterprise Storage and HCI*, March 2024.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

Figure 1. System-related Challenges With On-premises Block Storage Environments

Which of the following, if any, are your organization's system-related challenges with on-premises data center-based storage for block environments? (Percent of respondents, N=375, multiple responses accepted)

Challenge	Percent
Integration with broader IT management and automation platforms and tools	35%
Performance	34%
Time/effort required to provision capacity for consumers of IT services	33%
Performance of data services	31%
Support for application modernization initiatives, microservices, or container-based applications	30%
Providing sufficient staff/addressing skill shortages	30%
Hardware costs	30%
Physical space	29%
Deployment time for new storage infrastructure	28%
System management	27%
Power and cooling costs	27%
Diagnosing, isolating, and troubleshooting system issues	26%
Storage hardware utilization	25%
We have not experienced any challenges	15%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Conclusion

NetApp notes a long-standing tradeoff in the block storage market, where IT organizations have had to choose between simple, easy-to-use storage or high-performance scale-out storage with advanced data management. Accordingly, the company has designed the new A-series to deliver both, providing IT organizations with a simple but powerful storage solution for their critical block-oriented storage workloads, such as VMware-based applications and database workloads running Oracle, SAP, Microsoft SQL Server and Epic.

The new systems feature the types of substantial performance improvements that you'd expect. Compared to the previous models, the new A-Series offers substantial performance improvements, providing up to 2x performance increases overall with up to 12m IOPS and consistent sub-millisecond latency. And because the ASA family runs NetApp's core OnTap software, the systems feature the comprehensive and rich data management capabilities that

NetApp is well known for, such as SnapMirror active sync, comprehensive data security capabilities from NetApp's Ransomware Recovery Guarantee, and a six-nines data availability guarantee. The A-Series is available in three models, spanning from mid-range to high-end and scaling out to a maximum of 12 nodes and up to 54PB of effective capacity, while assuming 4:1 storage efficiency (91TB-16PB raw).

What really makes the new A-Series stand out from its predecessors is its simplicity. Rather than overlay a new GUI on top of the existing management software, it features a comprehensive new management system, aligned with NetApp's BlueXP management stack. This dramatically simplifies the entire system management process from the initial setup process around deployment and provisioning through to day-to-day management, such as upgrades and setting up data protection policies, as well as deep integration with VMware management.

Crucially, this not only expedites system management, but also means the A-Series can be managed by IT staff without deep levels of NetApp-specific, or even storage-specific, expertise. To demonstrate this, at the product's launch at INSIGHT, a nontechnical intern set up an A-Series system in less than a minute.

Finally, IT budgets continue to come under pressure as organizations deal with a wide range of cost issues, from potential changes to their VMware licensing, to finding the funds to invest in new AI initiatives. In this regard, NetApp's focus on the affordability of the new A-Series is a further reason to take note. The company claims 25%-50% lower upfront pricing relative to its competitors, as well as an improved ROI over time, with savings driven by lower cost of management, industry leading raw-to-effective storage efficiency, and reduced power consumption.

NetApp aimed to make a big statement when it released its first dedicated block storage ASA in 2023. With the new A-Series, the company is doubling down on its commitment to deliver a class-leading blend of performance, feature richness, affordability, and simplicity.

About Enterprise Strategy Group
TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group provides focused and actionable market intelligence, demand-side research, analyst advisory services, GTM strategy guidance, solution validations, and custom content supporting enterprise technology buying and selling.

contact@esg-global.com
www.esg-global.com