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THIS TARMIN MAN

STORAGE EDITOR DAVID TYLER CATCHES UP WITH SHAHBAZ ALI, FOUNDER AND CEO OF TARMIN INC., WINNERS OF BOTH THE ARCHIVING & COMPLIANCE PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AND STORAGE MONITORING PRODUCT OF THE YEAR FOR THEIR GRIDBANK PRODUCT RANGE

David Tyler: Tarmin has been around for a few years now but it's only relatively recently that the company and its GridBank offerings have started to appear on the 'radar' of storage professionals. How did the company come about?

Shahbaz Ali: The whole GridBank concept originally came into being as a result of a number of high profile projects in banking and telecoms that I had been involved in. I realised that data was typically residing in a variety of different silos, and that the management of that data was becoming a major issue in terms of administration as well as from the point of view of user accessibility. I could see significant risk as well in terms of security, data protection and indeed data loss. These risks are actually much bigger in the long run than they might appear on a balance sheet or financial reporting. This is because they are hard to quantify, and aren't being accurately measured as a company grows and its storage requirements grow with it.

If you are an 'information economy' type company and your critical data is spread across various silos and storage sub-systems then security, access control and compliance are all of paramount importance. I looked at these issues, along with how storage infrastructure was typically being managed, and then I looked at the storage industry in general: there was a lot of 'lock-in' happening among the large vendors. For a long time a lot of vendors have been creating proprietary interfaces - in spite of FibreChannel, iSCSI, SAN and all sorts of other things being readily available. This creates a problem when users' data requirements grow, because they then have to go back to those vendors to upgrade. Traditionally they would then 'throw disks at the problem' - an approach that has a secondary impact in areas like Green IT, obviously, as well.

DT: So having identified the key issues facing the storage industry - or rather its users - you went about devising a product approach to address those issue?

SA: Exactly. Tarmin's GridBank technology came about as a result of all those problems that we'd seen: we saw a clear need for a solution approach that combined the applications and user accessibility with the infrastructure itself. The storage industry has tended to always create point solutions; de-dupe, compression, storage management, archiving and so on. We decided to instead to create a holistic data management solution that would address many user and application requirements in a single tightly integrated offering. In this way you have a single product capable of delivering a whole range of capabilities. So, your Exchange server would like to off-load emails to that data management platform. Your SharePoint and document management systems would like to offload some of the data they hold. Your end users would like to use Home directories for a completely transparent 'storage on demand' type of environment. At the same time a lot of large corporates today have geographically diverse operations - multiple sites, multiple systems. So it was

"In enterprise deployments, users are faced with regulatory, compliance and security issues, all of which increase the complexity of allowing users, applications and networks to access the data in their systems. Our solution reduces that complexity by creating automatic policies that are managed by admin - or even by your legal/compliance department. This allows one to comply with FSA regulations, Sarbanes-Oxley, retention and disposition schedules, amongst other requirements, in a way that integrates seamlessly with existing solutions." **Shahbaz Ali, founder and CEO of Tarmin Inc**

important for us to create a single global view of storage. One product capable of solving all these requirements is Tarmin GridBank.

Tarmin's product offering today, after seven years of effort, is actually a testament to those requirements. We weren't following a path towards the Cloud, or toward Big Data - we followed what we knew our customers wanted. There has on occasion been criticism that our approach is too feature-rich - a kind of 'Swiss Army Knife' product. Our response to that is simple: our customers love it. Customers like the NHS say that they can now re-purpose their old storage systems, they can re-use commodity hardware, alongside any new storage products that come along - because we are completely hardware and storage agnostic. Our feature-rich platform allows customers to integrate applications, users and networks into the system transparently. This gives the end user the ability to manage their data in a supremely cost-effective manner.

DT: The Tarmin slogan is 'Store, Control, Understand'. Can you put that into context in terms of how your product offerings differ from the rest of the market?

SA: It's a useful short-hand for us when talking to users. Firstly, with 'Store' we are talking primarily about the cost of storing something. As a young company, we price our solution much more competitively than the larger, more established players in this space. Our storage management layer actually reduces the cost of storage in a far more disruptive way than the competition. We do this through unique proprietary technologies that we have created, such as Object De-Dupe.

Then, when we talk about 'Control' we are actually talking about reducing complexity across the enterprise. In enterprise deployments, users are faced with regulatory, compliance and security issues, all of which increase the complexity of allowing users, applications and networks to access the data in their systems. Our solution reduces that complexity by creating

automatic policies that are managed by admin - or even by your legal/compliance department. This allows one to comply with FSA regulations, Sarbanes-Oxley, retention and disposition schedules, amongst other requirements, in a way that integrates seamlessly with existing Records Management solutions. RM systems focus on preservation of the data, of course, whereas our focus is on managing that data in the most effective manner. With clients in industries such as pharmaceuticals having requirements to preserve records for decades, that's where we see migration of storage media becoming a real challenge.

Then of course we have the new trend which is Big Data. If you store lots of data within your organisation, but you don't get the full value from the information, then that is going to affect your bottom line. This is where our 'Understand' keyword comes in. There are lots of emerging technologies within corporates and research organisations which are being deployed to try to help them to better understand and derive value from of all their data. What Tarmin can provide to assist with that is our excellent search technology, which can index over 500 different file formats, including some specific to the oil and gas industries, for instance. The strength of that search capability is unique, we believe. Truly powerful content indexing is very rare in the storage industry. This means that we can position our product as 'Big Data Middleware', which fills a real gap in the industry. All the big storage vendors have storage management software offerings, and there are also lots of visualisation/analytics products out there.

But there is no obvious integration path - these products simply use the storage that is there. We believe that what is really needed is a scalable framework that can handle any data, on any storage system - and that's where Tarmin comes in!

More info: www.tarmin.com