



Business challenge

Caught between public cloud backup services that are limited in scope, scalability and performance, and on premises solutions that are costly and over-sized, how can mid-market firms protect their data?

Transformation

CenterGrid's hybrid RecoveryCenter solution, based on IBM® Spectrum Protect™ and Frontsafe Cloud Portal, provides fully managed enterprise capabilities priced to fit the needs of mid-market businesses.



Tim Campbell
President, CenterGrid

Business benefits

Hybrid

cloud data protection gives clients completely new capabilities

Enables

mid-size firms to benefit from enterprise capabilities

Low-cost

solution cuts client administration and boosts confidence

CenterGrid

Making enterprise data protection affordable for mid-market clients

Headquartered just outside of Cincinnati, in Hamilton, OH, CenterGrid operates a state-of-the-art data center from which it offers a full stack of IT hosting and support services. With a focus on serving mid-market clients that have outgrown their IT infrastructures, CenterGrid is enjoying rapid growth.

“Scalability is the major benefit that Spectrum Protect gives us.”

— Tim Campbell, President, CenterGrid

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Spotting a gap in the market

The emergence of pay-as-you-use public cloud backup providers has afforded enormous benefits to both individuals and small businesses, making it easy for them to store data offsite as a protection against disaster. At the other end of the scale, large enterprises continue to employ sophisticated on premises data protection solutions offering multi platform support and policy based retention capabilities. In between these two options, however, mid-size firms are struggling to find solutions that are both effective and economically viable.

For these mid-size businesses, mass market cloud backup solutions are too limited in scope and performance, and do not scale cost-effectively to their needs. Meanwhile, on premises enterprise solutions for backup and recovery are often over-sized for their requirements, and typically require costly investments in both infrastructure and highly skilled specialist personnel.

Building on its existing managed hosting expertise, CenterGrid saw a clear opportunity to grow its business into cloud data protection services,

as company President Tim Campbell explains: “We saw a hole in the market between low-end cloud offerings and enterprise class on premises or colocated solutions at the top end. No one was really servicing the needs of mid-market companies, which were effectively over-paying for insufficient data protection.”

Campbell makes the point that mid-size organizations are storing increasing volumes of business critical data, but lack the internal IT resources to properly manage backup, recovery, archive and retention policies.

“Although they lack the scale to make an enterprise solution economically viable, these mid-size organizations certainly have real IT challenges, and they need real IT solutions with predictability and scalability,” says Campbell. “Consumer cloud backup solutions are simply not up to the task. Our target clients are certainly already backing up their data, but generally they do not have confidence that they can recover it fast or reliably enough. We set out to give these mid-size companies enterprise-grade data protection within a high touch specialist support model, charged as a monthly recurring service.”

The solution is hybrid cloud

Having tried and rejected a variety of backup software packages for being insufficiently scalable, CenterGrid found itself drawn back to IBM Spectrum Protect (formerly IBM Tivoli® Storage Manager). Campbell takes up the story: “We had substantial in-house skills in Spectrum Protect and experience of running very large enterprise environments for our hosted clients. We knew that the solution was up to the challenge, and realized that all we needed to do was build multi tenancy into it. An IBM executive introduced us to the Frontsafe Cloud Portal software, and the combination gave us the ability to bring enterprise data protection to multiple mid-size clients.”

Frontsafe Cloud Portal, from Danish company Front-Safe, sits on top of Spectrum Protect to maintain multiple distinct backup and recovery landscapes. In addition to handling all the technical challenges, it makes it easy for service providers to report and bill to individual clients—and even enables them to “white label” by selling capacity to other service providers, who can then resell the service to their own clients in turn.

“Combining IBM Spectrum Protect with Frontsafe Cloud Portal enabled us to create our RecoveryCenter solution, which brings enterprise data protection within the financial reach of the mid-market,” says Campbell. “For a simple monthly per-GB fee, CenterGrid provides the peace of mind of knowing that all your data is protected and recoverable.”

RecoveryCenter is a hybrid cloud offering: CenterGrid deploys a hardware appliance in its clients’ locations that runs Spectrum Protect and maintains local backups. These local backups are replicated to CenterGrid’s own data center for full offsite protection. “The hybrid model provides the convenience and speed of local backup and recovery, with the reassurance that all data is also preserved offsite in case of disaster,” says Campbell. “The hybrid cloud approach with differential and incremental backups from Spectrum Protect also minimizes the external bandwidth required. We tell our clients that you need a good offsite backup, because something only needs to go wrong once in the whole time you’re protecting your data. One client saw the value very clearly when his company got compromised by the CryptoLocker malware. We had him up and running again from the onsite backup in just 90 minutes!”

CenterGrid is currently storing almost one PB of client data, with a typical client backup size of 15 TB. Around half of its clients have fully virtualized server landscapes; Spectrum Protect has built-in tools for backing up and recovering VMware, Xen Server, Hyper-V and other virtualization technologies. CenterGrid will soon launch an option for bare-metal recovery of virtual servers, which will enable its clients to fire up virtual servers in CenterGrid's data center. This means that, in the event of a disaster, they will be able to restart services from the last good backup, minimize disruption to their business, and buy time to repair or replace their own server hardware.

As standard, CenterGrid retains the last three versions of files for its clients, who can use the Frontsafe Cloud Portal to perform file-level restores if they wish to revert to a previous version (though in practice many clients choose to have CenterGrid manage the recovery process).

Backup confidence – at the right price

IBM Spectrum Protect and Frontsafe Cloud Portal give CenterGrid the combination of scalability and multi-tenancy it needs to run its RecoveryCenter solution. “Scalability is the major benefit that Spectrum Protect gives us,” comments Campbell. “We’ve worked with many other backup products that struggle with larger data sets; the way the IBM solution consumes the data is very impressive, and we are unlikely ever to need the full scale of what we could achieve with it. With the Frontsafe multi tenancy software layered on top, we can offer a true enterprise product at accessible pricing—an extremely compelling value proposition for our mid-market clients.”

Clients that sign up to the RecoveryCenter hybrid cloud solution get a fully featured, fully managed local backup and recovery solution

offering highly granular controls and extremely rapid restores of data. Equally, with all data stored on CenterGrid's remote infrastructure, clients also have the peace of mind that their business can recover even from a total loss of the local IT infrastructure.

“Clearly, our solution saves many hours of administration each week for clients, enabling them to focus their skilled technical resources on core activities that add value to their business,” says Campbell. “But the bigger—although less visible—value of the solution is the confidence it gives clients that their vital data is protected against loss: reliably, conveniently and at low cost per GB. They no longer need to think about backup; we take that whole headache away. They can also see that the recovery works, and of course, that's what they're really buying. No one actually wants to do backup; backup is what they have to do so that they can get a reliable recovery after a problem.”

The RecoveryCenter option provides extremely competitive pricing both against less-reliable consumer cloud options and against the on premises, owned solution model. “In an ownership model, you're paying maintenance and support fees, and you also have the challenge of maintaining the right skill sets in-house,” says Campbell. “Mid-market companies typically cannot afford to dedicate a person exclusively to backup, so the quality suffers and their confidence in the backup falls. CenterGrid enjoys massive economies of scale that allow us to provide highly skilled support when and where it's needed, allowing our clients to focus on their business and not on the systems that their business runs on. We do backup for a living, so we're extremely good at it!”

He concludes: “Our message to mid-size businesses is that big enterprise data protection isn't just for big enterprises any longer. With IBM Spectrum Protect and Frontsafe, we can deliver those enterprise capabilities at a price that makes economic sense.”

Solution components

- IBM® Spectrum Protect™

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Take the next step

To learn more about IBM Spectrum Protect solutions, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: ibm.com/storage/spectrum/protect

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