

## **RoboBak Locks Onto SMBs**

Software startup ROBObak will crank up its data protection strategy next week, touting block-level de-duplication for SMBs.

ROBObak, which was born out of software distributor ROBOdrs, will take the wraps off a family of products it claims can boost the security of data backed up from remote and branch offices -- hence "ROBO."

The startup's flagship offering is the eponymous ROBObak software, which CEO Ron Roberts is aiming squarely at smaller businesses. "There's 187 backup companies trying to claw their way" into large data centers, he says.

Like a number of other storage vendors, ROBObak is throwing its weight behind a technique called de-duplication, which only transmits data that has changed since the last backup, greatly reducing the amount of data that needs to be stored and moving it more rapidly over the network.

Where ROBObak differs from offerings such as EMC's Centera is that the startup focuses on block-level as opposed to file-level data, which Roberts claims makes it easier to back up complex files like video and graphics. "We pick up only the changed block [of data]," he says. "We compress it, encrypt it, and transport it to a central server for safety."

ROBObak is not the only vendor adopting the block-level approach. "This whole area of data de-duplication is so hot that no vendor wants to be left behind," explains Taneja Group analyst Arun Taneja. "They are all jazzing up their sales pitches."

Sepaton, Diligent, and Data Domain (which recently filed for an IPO) also take a "sub-file-level" approach to de-duplication, according to the analyst, who says that an advanced form of de-dupe called "variable block" is also emerging. "Variable block," which is used by Avamar (now part of EMC), accounts for minute changes in data bit patterns, offering extremely precise de-duplication. "Sepaton and Diligent use intelligence of that type and extract de-dupe at the byte level," adds Taneja.

With a number of enterprise-level de-dupe vendors already established in the market, Taneja feels that ROBObak's focus on SMBs could prove crucial. "They are not trying to give a backup solution for the data center," he says, adding that the startup's technology is conceptually similar to that of Asigra.

Like Asigra, ROBObak's software runs on a Windows 2003 server in the data center and does not require an agent to be installed on remote office devices. "The client connects directly to [the server]," says Roberts.

This doesn't mean that no tweaks need to be made to remote office kit. For "up-to-the-second" backups, ROBObak users have to install an additional product, Open File Manager, in their remote sites. Like the standard ROBObak software, Open File Manager runs on a Windows 2003 server.

The core technology behind Open File Manager has already been OEM'd to more than two dozen companies, according to Roberts, although he would not name names.

Next week the startup will also unveil an archiving software called ROBOark, which runs on the same data center server as the core ROBObak software. "It follows a set of retention rules," says Roberts. "For example: 'Keep this information on ROBOark for five years, and after five years, move it to hard media or tape.' "

Pricing for ROBObak's core backup software is \$9,995 for 1 Tbyte of data, with Open File Manager priced at \$1,000 per Tbyte. ROBOark is priced at \$5,000 per Tbyte, and all three software products are available now.

ROBObak's Roberts tells *Byte and Switch* his firm will only be selling its products via resellers, a sensible move, given that the startup's workforce numbers just 19 people.

Up to this point, the startup has relied on private investment from a group of individuals, including Roberts himself, although he would not reveal any further financial information, saying only that the firm is "quite well funded."

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