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Spectra Logic Scores Data Archive Wins as HPC Market Gets "Greener"

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Comment by Steve Conway

Storage solutions vendor Spectra Logic has been racking up impressive wins lately at some of the world's most prestigious and demanding high performance computing (HPC) sites, including NASA Ames, Argonne National Laboratory, and Los Alamos National Laboratory.

What's interesting is the important and growing role "green" factors have been playing in Spectra Logic's growing momentum. Take the NASA Ames example. After a nine-month competitive evaluation, Ames chose Spectra Logic to install two Spectra T950 tape libraries with drives and media, providing up to 32 petabytes of storage capacity with data compression. The customer liked Spectra Logic's long-term roadmap and ease-of-use, including its semi-autonomic "Assisted Self Maintenance" capability. But other big deciding factors were the energy-efficiency of the company's storage solution and another environmental factor: storage density high enough to free up 1,400 square feet of data center floor space!

NASA Ames can now use the freed-up space to add more compute cores. One of the anomalies of the HPC market is that it has an almost insatiable appetite for more computing power. In most other IT markets, the primary "green" driver is reducing power and cooling costs in order to boost profitability. HPC users typically don't drop "green" savings (power, cooling, or space) to the bottom line; instead, they use the savings to buy more cores. And the cycle continues: additional cores boost the need for memory bandwidth and storage, on up to the multi-petabyte archival storage levels that NASA Ames acquired from Spectra Logic.

Thanks to ballooning core counts, HPC systems are getting physically larger at a rapid clip. In a recent private IDC research study, two-thirds of the HPC sites were planning to expand their HPC data centers or build new ones. Most said their existing centers could accommodate their next system purchase but not the one after that. Government HPC data centers have the least head- and elbow room for expansion, compared with their counterparts in industry and academia. And all other things being equal, bigger HPC systems with more cores require not just more floor space, but higher power and cooling costs.

This situation plays right into the hands of a company like Spectra Logic, whose data archiving solutions are designed to handle skyrocketing HPC data volumes with strong sensitivity toward the "green" factors of power, cooling, and floor space. Five years ago, these environmental factors didn't make the top 10 list of HPC users' concerns. Today, they loom large at number three on the list, just below price and price/performance. Spectra Logic and other vendors that can demonstrate "green" competitive advantage stand to gain market share in HPC.

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