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NetworkWorld Review

Dantz's Retrospect Server Edition

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A new twist to Windows backup

Operating system vendors in general have routinely fallen short in their efforts to bundle good back-up applications that can protect data on servers and clients across enterprise networks.

Dantz Development's Retrospect Server Edition Version 5.6 is unusual software that addresses this operating system shortfall in a unique way. It provides incremental server and workstation backup based on its own cataloging, rather than the ancient archive bit offered by other back-up programs on the market.

This methodology, we found in our testing of the latest version of the product, provides a unique back-up scheme for Windows servers and Windows and Mac clients. By taking cataloged snapshots of aggregate data, Retrospect creates its own back-up filing system that combines for speed, convenience and easy management, giving us good reason to designate it a World Class product.

Retrospect builds its catalog based on file name, creation date and last modified date attributes, as opposed to using the standard binary operating system archive semaphore used by other back-up utilities. The Retrospect server builds a user-definable back-up set and then builds backups based on iterative file deltas on target clients and servers.

Retrospect restores the iterative change sets by collecting the catalog entries specific to the target machine then restores all at once, or to a specified version. This method lets you roll machines back to desired states. Dantz calls this feature IncrementalPlus, and

it gives users good management support with a minimum of administrator intervention.

Dantz also licenses clients and servers at the same price, which is quite cost-effective compared with other pricing schemes. We tested the product on a Windows 2000 Advanced Server, and a Windows 98SE PC using a variety of tape drives (see How we did it, www.nwfusion.com, DocFinder: 9026). Retrospect installs as a background process at the server.

The client software installs simply, and Retrospect can use multicast or broadcast domains, direct addressing or Windows Internet Name Service to find its clients if desired, so that missing roaming licensed Retrospect client members can be found and backups started in an unattended fashion. We also successfully used Retrospect over broadband VPNs using Point-to-Point and IP Security protocols.

Retrospect supported all of the writeable media in our lab, and Dantz maintains a painfully exact list of tape drives/autochangers, CD-RW/DVD-RAM and other devices

that it supports. Backups to server media also are supported, although a back-up set cannot exceed the size of the volume of a discrete back-up media. This means that CD-RW devices, even though Retrospect compresses data, aren't very useful for modern backups, while DVD-RAM drives might be. Dantz also uses a non-Windows-compatible International Standards Organization file system for CD-writeable devices that can't be booted or read by NT File System or File allocation table-based Windows machines.

In Retrospect's favor, its ability to judge a server's removable media and back-up device state and then represent that visually is strong.

Retrospect Snapshots group files within back-up sets to picture the state of files within volumes that have been selected for back-up. Snapshots keep the dependencies of the files listed in the Retrospect catalog in groups. Snapshots are easy to manipulate, and they make restoring groups of files or an entire volume simple.

Although, because of the Snapshot method, restores made through a search of

the catalog don't have NTFS or Mac file-sharing privileges restored with them unless the files are restored from a Snapshot, making the restore-by-search feature less handy than we had hoped. We used the search feature during random restores, then had to manually cross-

reference a Snapshot to retrieve files with access permissions intact.

Retrospect is speedy in backup and restore operations, whether iterative periodic backups or entire volume restores. We also did a bare-metal restore on 98SE and Win 2000 with success. Autochanger

operations were somewhat faster than competing back-up applications because Dantz let us select back-up sets from specific tapes within the autochanger magazine, permitting comparatively direct access during backups and restores from back-up set Snapshots.

Net Results

Dantz Retrospect Server Edition 5.6

4.55
RATING


Company: Dantz Development, (925)253-3000, www.dantz.com

Pros: Highly controllable back-up processes; extensive media support; strong management features; great documentation.

Cons: Lacks Linux/Unix support and search-and-restore feature.

What's the score?

Dantz Retrospect Server Edition

Management/Administration 40%	4.8	
Performance 40%	4.7	
Operating system compatibility 10%	3.5	
Hardware support 10%	4.0	
TOTAL SCORE	4.55	

Individual category scores are based on a scale of 1 to 5. **Percentages** are the weight given each category in determining the total score. ■ **Scoring Key:** **5:** Exceptional showing in this category. Defines the standard of excellence. **4:** Very good showing. Although there may be room for improvement, this product was much better than the average. **3:** Average showing in this category. Product was neither especially good nor exceptionally bad. **2:** Below average. Lacked some features or lower performance than other products or than expected **1:** Consistently subpar, or lacking features being reviewed.

A few missed steps

There are several things missing from Retrospect Server Edition. The first is support for Linux/Unix/xBSD as clients or servers. (Macintosh is supported.)

Also missing is a Web browser interface to the server application, which would make accessibility easier for branch-office support.

The final shortcoming we found was that while its back-up sets are easy to create, they couldn't be modified after creation. While some rigidity is acceptable, it also meant that we created back-up sets that became superfluous but necessary for the restoration process. Therefore, back-up sets must be well thought out prior to execution and aren't good for experimentation value. But overall, the highly articulate convenience that Retrospect provides over competitive back-up and restore products will be welcomed by most network professionals, despite its few rough edges.

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