ESG Brief

Varonis: Secure Enterprise Collaboration and File Sharing

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Abstract: *With the burgeoning workplace mobility trend, and the pervasive requirements for file sharing and collaboration, organizations must provide employees with the necessary tools to stay productive and secure anywhere, at any time, and on any device. Since security is top of mind for IT, leaving employees to their own devices is not an option. Companies cannot take the chance of losing control of business-critical and sensitive data by having it compromised, corrupted, deleted, or worse. So while organizations are taking steps to find ways to embrace the ubiquitous "anywhere, anytime, any device," mantra, cloud-based enterprise file sharing still has enterprises wary.*

Varonis, a provider of software solutions for unstructured, human-generated enterprise data, appears to be taking on the ever-present security issue in the growing file sharing and collaboration movement. With DatAnywhere, the Varonis alternative to a cloud-based enterprise file sync and share (EFSS) solution, the vendor says it is transforming the corporate infrastructure into a secure cloud-like file synchronization platform. If this is the case, it could give Varonis a competitive advantage over entirely cloud-based solutions.

Overview

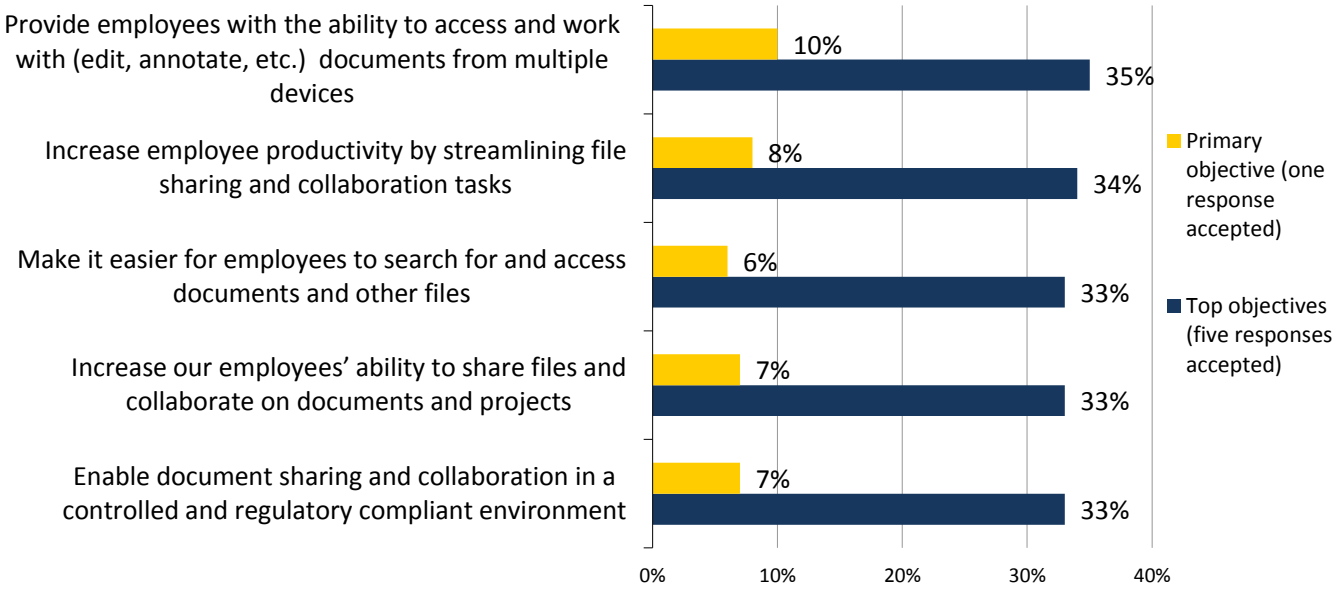
The trend toward workplace mobility is on the rise, with employees working anywhere, anytime, on any device. So it comes as no surprise that the challenge for IT in supporting mobile devices has been on the rise as well. IT has been forced to rapidly respond to employee mobility requirements because the alternative is leaving employees to their own devices—literally. Just point and click, and you have a free solution to access your stored files at any time and on your own mobile devices. While this is convenient for employees, it can be one endless headache for IT. The IT organization must take on the daunting responsibilities of securing a variety of devices, a massive number of endpoints, provisioning accounts, enforcing BYOD policies, and having insight into the data in their file shares—all in the name of keeping business-critical and sensitive corporate data secure.

To meet business objectives, facilitate workplace mobility, and ensure that employees don't take matters into their own hands, organizations know they must provide a secure and convenient means for file sharing and collaboration. In fact, ESG research published last year indicates that organizations have deployed enterprise file sync and share (EFSS) solutions to enable workforce mobility, enhance productivity, and increase collaboration (see Figure 1), though these deployments have largely been limited in scope to workgroups and employees that require mobile collaboration.[1] In addition, many of these deployments have been cloud-based. Why cloud-based? Early solutions on the market were cloud-based, and there weren't alternatives. Over the past couple of years, however, alternative solutions have emerged to enable a cloud file sharing and collaboration experience for employees that also keep data on-premises.

[1] Source: ESG Research Report, *Online File Sharing and Collaboration: Deployment Model Trends*, February 2014.

Figure 1. Top Five Reasons Organizations Deployed EFSS Solutions

What objectives was your organization looking to achieve by using an online file sharing and collaboration service(s)? Which would you say was the primary objective for your organization? (Percent of respondents, N=231)



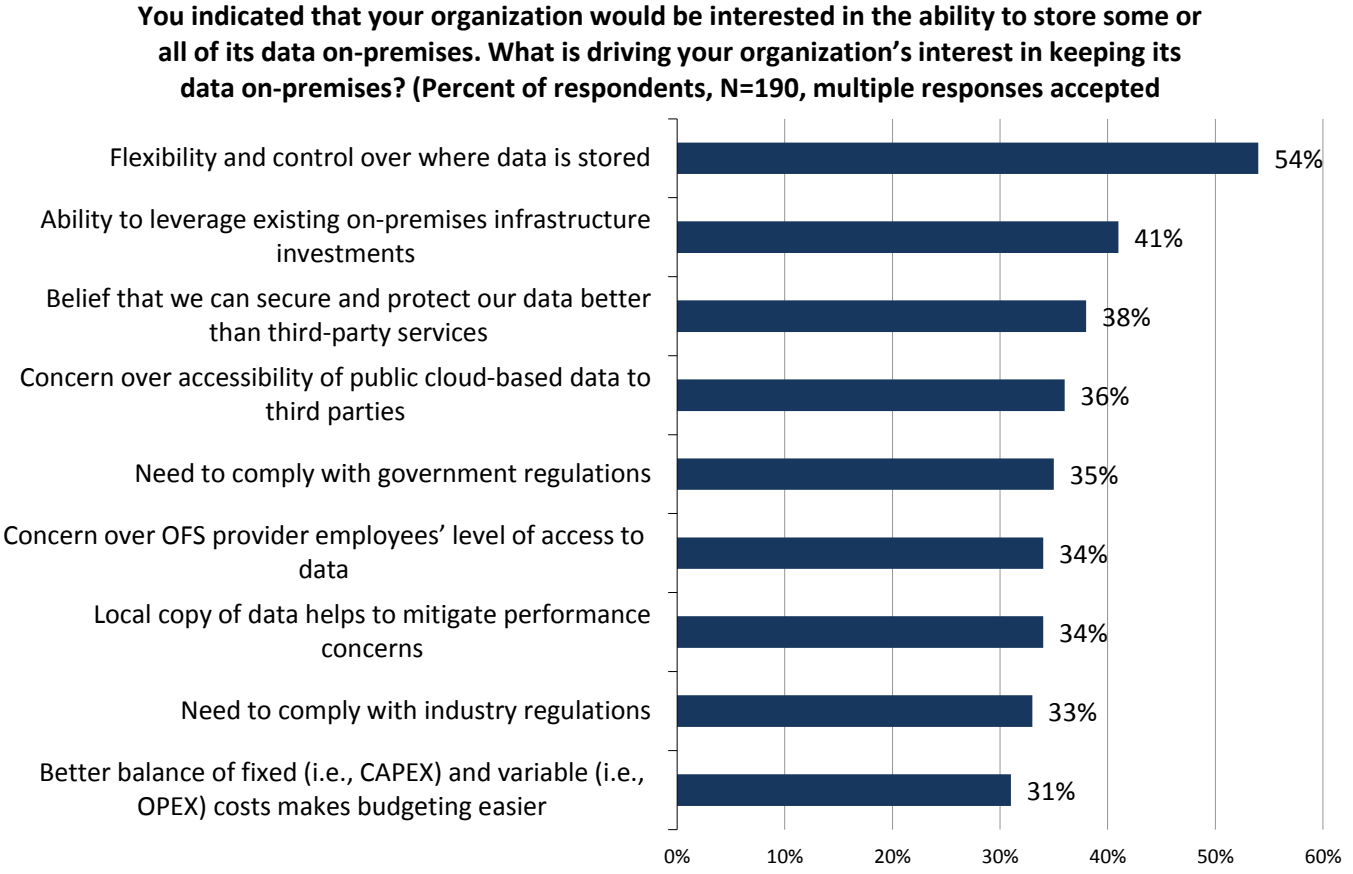
Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, 2015.

While many current online file sharing and collaboration customers use a public cloud deployment model, according to ESG research, a majority of responding IT professionals are extremely (69%) or somewhat (28%) interested in a hybrid model that would allow them to retain all or at least some data on-premises. Similarly, potential online file sharing adopters were more likely to leverage some type of hybrid cloud offering than a public cloud or completely on-premises solution for future corporate deployments.[2]

The drivers behind this desire to keep some or all data on-premises are pretty basic—a desire for flexibility and control over where data is stored; the ability to leverage existing infrastructure investments; and a belief that organizations are better suited to protect their own corporate information (see Figure 2).[3]

[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

Figure 2. Factors Driving Interest in On-premises Storage



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, 2015.

Varonis DatAnywhere: Secure Access, Simplified Collaboration

A provider of software solutions for unstructured, human-generated enterprise data, Varonis appears to be taking on the security issue in the growing file sharing and collaboration movement. Human-generated, unstructured data is found everywhere—and can include spreadsheets, documents, presentations, audio and video files, text messages, and any other employee-created data. In turn, this data may comprise financial records, intellectual property, regulated information, and additional critical company information.

Varonis is offering DatAnywhere, the vendor's alternative to a cloud-based enterprise file sync and share (EFSS) solution. The vendor is promoting the solution as one that can transform an organization's *existing* corporate infrastructure into a secure, cloud-like file synchronization platform.

According to Varonis, with DatAnywhere businesses will get the best of both worlds—IT will be able to leverage the organization's existing IT on-premises infrastructure, retaining full control over file share data, and employees will have quick and secure access to their files on mobile devices of their choosing.

DatAnywhere can be used for a variety of use cases including data governance, data security, file synchronization, information collaboration, mobile data accessibility, and archiving.

DatAnywhere is currently sold through channel partners, with pricing based on a per-user model, independent of how much data an organization is synchronizing or how many devices an employee is using. According to the vendor, in a 500-user environment, the price would run about $40 per user in the U.S. *This is a one-time fee, not a recurring monthly charge*. As the number of users increases, the price per user decreases. This appears to be a good option for companies that have large quantities of data, and are not willing to pay based on throughput or quantity of data eligible to be synced.

Founded in 2005, Varonis has a large enterprise customer base of more than 3,500. Its customers span organizations from education to technology, financial services to healthcare, industrial to retail, energy and utilities to media and entertainment. Customers include Barclays Financial, Boston University, MoMA, HIT Entertainment, and Arnold Worldwide to name a few.

To generate more awareness around its products, last June Varonis began offering a free version of DatAnywhere that can be used by up to five users for free—for a lifetime.

Good Marks in Education

Varonis has found popularity in the education sector, both in the United States and abroad. For example, a large educational institution in the UK needed a secure, cost-effective solution to manage file sharing and collaboration among its more than 32,000 students and 4,700 staff. Fast forward, and the University of Liverpool has since deployed DatAnywhere to ensure that no one has access to shared data unless they are supposed to, and IT can retain control over the file shares.

A private U.S. educational institution is successfully using DatAnywhere in conjunction with their course registration system. When a student registers for a course, the student is now automatically added to the class list, and any data associated with that class is synced to that student's laptop. In addition, IT doesn't need to add each new student to Active Directory.

Up against well-known vendors in the field, Varonis was recently awarded a contract at a large U.S. university to update its file sharing and collaboration system. The school's CIO decided that the university didn't want to relinquish control of its data, availability, and location, and felt Varonis presented the most viable solution. With DatAnywhere, the university can leverage its data in place, with a storage environment that it trusts, maintains, and backs up.

What It Means for Enterprises

Many established organizations have cloud-based EFSS solutions, their own data centers, file servers, and network-attached storage (NAS) devices that store astronomical amounts of data (think petabytes). Because they've already spent lots of time and money on their current file storage and sharing infrastructure, these companies have no interest in ripping out and replacing them.

Varonis differentiates itself among cloud-based EFSS solutions with DatAnywhere. What sets DatAnywhere apart from cloud vendors is that it plugs into an organization's existing file share environment—there's no building from the bottom up. This gives organizations a secure, cost-effective way to simplify collaboration and file sharing, while accommodating the organization's existing infrastructure, applications, and workflows.

DatAnywhere offers the following:

- Using existing infrastructure, installation can be done in 1-2 hours on-premises, with scalable synchronization across enterprise CIFS/SMB shares. In addition, DatAnywhere supports multiple servers in geographically dispersed locations, file caching, and de-duplication.
- Data doesn't need to be copied or migrated; cloud-based storage is unnecessary.
- Existing permissions are enforced, and users are authenticated with Active Directory.
- End-users enjoy the familiar drag and drop experience, so training isn't needed. Data is automatically backed up and version-controlled.

To Stub or Not to Stub?

The ability to stub files is built right in to DatAnywhere, which is an advantage for those organizations where most of the information with which the workforce deals is confidential and sensitive (think financial services and healthcare). That being the case, it's important for end-users to be able to work on documents, close them, and have them synced up to the server automatically. Nothing is left behind on the endpoint device but a stub. IT can restrict caching on the end-user's local device so that data that shouldn't live on the local device *doesn't* live on the local device—yet the information can still be actively accessed and edited.

Saving Time and Resources with Classification

Classifying data has always been a challenge. With that in mind, what is the best method for determining what would, or wouldn't, be eligible for DatAnywhere access? Rather than spending valuable time and resources culling through thousands or hundreds of thousands of documents, it would certainly make more sense to automate the process.

The vendor's audit and governance solutions, DatAdvantage and IDU Classification Framework, appear to help in this regard. When DatAdvantage and the integrated Classification Framework are used in conjunction with DatAnywhere, IT is able to gain insight into the company's file shares, assessing what should and shouldn't be mobilized or shared, thereby reducing the risks associated with managing file permissions. Varonis provides actionable intelligence that includes: giving IT visibility into groups, users, and file systems; classifying sensitive and business critical data; and displaying the level of protection surrounding each document.

From a content standpoint, DatAdvantage has the ability to provide a detailed audit trail of every access event. While important from a governance perspective, this feature also gives organizations an opportunity to determine how many company-generated documents are actually being opened, and how often. Armed with this information, organizations that produce large quantities of documents would have the opportunity to streamline document production, saving time and resources.

The Bigger Truth

The workplace mobility trend has made it simpler than ever before for employees to work anytime, anywhere, and on any device—using their own means of collaboration (just download, free software), or using the corporate-sanctioned solution, even if it doesn't work as well on mobile devices. But it isn't so simple for IT. They're being tasked with securing business-critical and sensitive data, and ensuring that employees are correctly provisioned and compliant with governance regulations.

Many organizations use cloud-based collaboration solutions, while others use their own data centers, file servers, and NAS devices, plus their back-end infrastructures, which still work well. Moving company data to the cloud can be cost-prohibitive, and requires that decisions be made about what data needs to be moved. And what happens to an organization's business processes when the data on which it relies gets moved? Generally, many companies are not ready, or just don't want to make big changes to their file share environments. Factoring in everything, an on-premises solution seems to be the answer.

DatAnywhere, Varonis' alternative to cloud-based enterprise file sharing, allows IT to leverage an organization's existing IT on-premises infrastructure, and retain control over file share data. There is no migrating or moving of data—the solution readily plugs into an organization's existing file share environment. At the same time, employees will receive quick and secure access to their files from any number of devices. DatAnywhere appears to be a good option for companies that deal with sensitive or confidential data, have large quantities of data, and are not inclined to pay exorbitant rates based on throughput or the quantity of data eligible to be synced.