

REPORT REPRINT

HYCU boosts Nutanix's partnership with Lenovo and launches backup as a service on GCP

STEVEN HILL

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At the beginning of 2018, Comtrade Software took the major step of spinning off and rebranding its data-protection and automation IP under the name HYCU (pronounced 'haiku'). It was an apt name change, considering the holistic approach the company has taken to data protection for the Nutanix platform, and in less than a year it has extended its Zen-like model to include native data protection for the Google Cloud Platform (GCP), and built a partnership with Lenovo to sell HYCU as part of its Nutanix-based lineup.

We had several questions when we first examined HYCU's data-protection platform over a year ago, and a lot of them revolved around its exclusive commitment to Nutanix. We could understand it, given the vision both companies shared of simplifying the acquisition, deployment and management of next-generation IT infrastructure, but the idea of tying a 'new' data-protection vendor's success to a single platform still seemed a bit risky. But as it promised from its inception, HYCU has delivered a matching, native data-protection product for GCP, as well as formed a direct reseller pact with Lenovo.

THE 451 TAKE

When HYCU emerged as a new brand in mid-2017, it had the luxury of starting out with a preexisting team of engineers with over two decades of deep technology monitoring and integration experience, and that shows in its approach to data protection as a service for both Nutanix and the Google Cloud Platform. Whether you call it cloud-like or automated, turnkey simplicity is becoming table stakes for a growing number of key applications like data protection. But true simplicity is actually quite hard to pull off, especially given the new levels of complexity created by the increasingly hybrid nature of IT infrastructure. HYCU's tight integration with Nutanix's management is particularly appealing for customers that have already adopted Nutanix's hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) because of its relative simplicity, but it's easy to see how that same level of application-aware data protection will appeal to a larger audience as HYCU continues to extend its model beyond Nutanix and GCP.

CONTEXT

Prior to its spinoff and rebranding in March, Boston-based HYCU was part of Comtrade Software, a company with nearly three decades of behind-the-scenes experience in developing application integration and systems monitoring technology for major customers like HP and Citrix. Today, HYCU is led by CEO Simon Taylor, who previously served as the president of Comtrade Software and the chief strategy officer of Comtrade Group, an IT provider with over \$400m in annual revenue.

While the Comtrade Group remains the primary shareholder in HYCU, the company is operationally independent and has the autonomy needed to pursue a rapidly evolving data-protection market. HYCU currently has approximately 350 employees and has built relationships with 10 ISV partners and more than 1,000 worldwide customers. All of its sales come from a group of over 200 channel partners, with a customer base that currently spans 40 countries worldwide, although about 50% of its sales come from within the US.

TECHNOLOGY

HYCU has two main products that focus on data protection, both custom-built from the ground up for its technology partners, Nutanix and the Google Cloud Platform. It's worth noting that the company hasn't strayed too far from its roots in systems monitoring and it continues to provide technology for vendors like Citrix, F5 and Nutanix – however, it also believes that data protection is a key challenge that can benefit directly from its decades of experience in systems monitoring and integration.

Its flagship product, HYCU Data Protection for Nutanix, focuses on simplifying and automating backup and recovery for applications running on the Nutanix HCI platform. HYCU protects both native Acropolis and VMware-based ESXi workloads, is easily deployable via Nutanix Calm, and features seamless integration and matched capabilities within the Nutanix Prism management interface to support both hypervisors. While HYCU's platform is designed to be hypervisor-agnostic, the APIs it uses remain optimized for Nutanix – therefore, as Nutanix certifies additional versions and features for AHV, they will also be incorporated by HYCU.

Another indicator of HYCU's deep integration with Nutanix lies in the performance efficiency offered by its agentless approach to application-aware data protection. The firm's automated application discovery process eliminates configuration challenges and optimizes both the backup and recovery process to better meet more specific SLO and RTO needs for each application. HYCU offers traditional snapshot, cloning, replication, compression and de-duplication services for block volumes, and it also has a nifty set of unique features such as stun-free, application-consistent ESX backup and recovery, as well as WAN-free backup for remote office/branch office applications that can reduce WAN network bandwidth by up to 50%. HYCU's efficiency also extends to Nutanix Files (formerly known as Acropolis File Services), where their agentless, low-overhead approach can accelerate file system backups by as much as 90%.

In July, the company announced HYCU for the Google Cloud Platform, a data-protection offering designed to bring the same level of deep integration with GCP as that offered on Nutanix's HCI systems. HYCU currently claims the only managed data-protection-as-a-service offering purpose-built for GCP, and it is designed to complement the Nutanix Xi Cloud Services initiative, which aims to provide a common model for managing, accessing, securing, monitoring and protecting applications in an increasingly multi-cloud world. While Nutanix Xi and Enterprise Cloud OS are slated for release on AWS, GCP and Azure, HYCU's data-protection model adapts to any Nutanix-supported multi-cloud environment.

STRATEGY

HYCU recently announced an upgraded relationship with Lenovo where its Nutanix data-protection product is pre-integrated and sold as a single SKU directly from Lenovo and its reseller network. Regardless of hardware partner, HYCU has remained committed to following Nutanix' lead and there's certainly growth potential as Nutanix Xi's multi-cloud management model gains popularity. While this has turned out to be a larger challenge than Nutanix expected, there's a lot to be said for bringing the simplicity of Nutanix's approach to infrastructure to the public cloud to create a seamless hybrid cloud environment.

The number of options introduced by hybrid cloud creates a different form of complexity that needs to be addressed via abstraction and automation. Of course, there are other vendors looking to do the same thing in a somewhat different way. HYCU's decision to back Nutanix still makes sense because the company remains an HCI market leader, but it's also likely that HYCU's simplified data-protection-as-a-service model will be applied to other platforms as opportunities arise.

COMPETITION

Today, data backup is only part of a larger DR/BC story that includes workload protection and industry-based compliance, as well as the growing need to provide greater visibility, access and granular management of unstructured data. Larger players such as Dell EMC, Hitachi Data Systems, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, IBM and VMware all offer data-protection options that work with Nutanix, as does Commvault, Veritas and – to a certain extent – even Nutanix. There are also literally dozens of secondary storage and data-protection vendors that are looking to combine backup with workload and unstructured data management. And while some of these vendors offer greater file- and object-based management capabilities, HYCU's as-a-service simplicity and tight integration with Nutanix and GCP are a compelling story for customers aiming to simplify their hybrid data-protection environment.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

HYCU hit the ground running in 2018 with an experienced engineering team with decades of systems monitoring and deep integration capabilities that have translated into easy button-level data protection.

WEAKNESSES

Adding GCP to HYCU's portfolio was a good start, but the company's primary market currently remains limited to Nutanix's partners and customers.

OPPORTUNITIES

There is the potential to grow HYCU's customer base independent of Nutanix as more public cloud partnerships extend its data-protection-as-a-service model into GCP and other public clouds.

THREATS

There are a growing number of data-protection, DR/BC and other secondary, software-defined storage providers that can still be competitive, even though they may not be as well-integrated with Nutanix and its cloud partners.