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U.S. defense department builds world's biggest SAN

by Chris Mellor

September 12, 2006 —The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) is creating the world's largest storage network by combining a number of separate networks into a gigantic 17,000-port Meta SAN monster.

The Meta SAN will store many petabytes (millions of gigabytes) of both administrative and mission-critical command and control data, and be put together by Brocade and **reVision**, an IT consultancy.

The existing SANs have multi-vendor storage devices, and Meta SAN will use securely connected end-points, virtualization technologies, and other techniques to tightly control access to each storage device and safeguard its highly sensitive data. Critical data is stored on high-performance storage devices, whereas less sensitive information is saved on cheaper arrays, cutting hardware costs across the DOD's agencies.

Brocade Professional Services will provide on-site engineering services for the storage infrastructure, and consultants from reVision will be in charge of integrating the component SANs. Dr. Shawn Landry, reVision's chief technologist said: "Given the DOD's large port counts, aggregating the SANs of multiple DOD agencies could have been extremely time-consuming and complex without a certified Brocade specialist working with us onsite.

The Meta SAN relies on Brocade's SilkWorm 48000 Director Blade FR4-18i and 48000 Directors for Fibre Channel over IP (FCIP) routing, to link the service agencies' geographically distributed SANs.

This architecture ensures that any faults on one SAN will not impact the other ones. The DOD can increase its storage capacity by adding new sub-SANs to Meta SAN without having to bulk out existing SANs to unrealistic levels.

The Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) is the IT backbone of the Defense Department. Almost every communication and piece of information DOD uses to keep afloat during emergency situations rides on the networks and infrastructure DISA provides. DISA fields, operates and maintains the department's Global Information Grid, its classified and unclassified intranet.

In May last year, the DOD set up a supercomputer SAN using SGI computers and drive arrays and Brocade SAN fabric boxes.

The US DOD includes the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, Reserve Forces and a multitude of other agencies in its vast organization. Amongst other things it is responsible for the New Orleans levees. It employs 5.3 million staff across 6,000 locations in 2002, with a budget of US\$371 billion.

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