



Turn up the BaaS

A Parablu Whitepaper

Turn up the BaaS!

Is a cloud hosted Backup as a Service (Baas) nowadays the best approach to protecting user data? Not always, but most of the time, it is.

Most people would have you believe that the world has gone completely the SaaS way. Email, file services, CRMs, you name it – are all served up from the cloud today. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to think of solutions that have not been SaaS-ified. Backup solutions are no exception – there is now a wide range of SaaS backup solutions to choose from – which provide services from the cloud to backup your endpoints, servers, your SaaS workloads etc.

But the reality is that there is a healthy number of customers who still don't SaaS – or at least not for all their applications. In particular, I've found several customers reluctant to move backup workloads to the cloud. The reasoning seems somewhat counter-intuitive because in many cases they're already letting their users keep primary data copies in cloud applications (like Salesforce, or Office 365), but when it comes to backup – they still like to keep things on-premise. Some are ok using cloud storage, but would still like to keep their backup servers on their premises.

The pandemic has upended a lot of traditional thinking – and for sure several advocates of on-premise backup workloads have now converted, but a substantial number are still quite fanatical about holding on to backup workloads. In some cases, there could be an unavoidable reason such as a regulation that requires them to keep backup data on-premises – but in most other cases, I have found the reasons quite flimsy.

We are a vendor that caters to customers of either inclination. And in our experience, all other things being equal, we have found that SaaS based backup customers invariably have a higher satisfaction rating than their counterparts who don't use the SaaS based offering. The reasons are several, and I thought it worthwhile to list them out.



Infrastructure Management

One important reason is that it lifts infrastructure related burdens off the shoulders of already over-worked IT administrators. Let's face it - hardware can be a headache. Backup servers and storage systems that go with them are more things to manage, secure, patch & keep up to date. Vulnerability assessments, penetration tests, Firewall and WAF rules to set and manage, integration with Active Directory, SIEM, SMTP, etc. etc. the list can go on. If these headaches can be outsourced, why not?

Human Resource Savings

Another big reason is the cost savings from staffing. In these times, with most organizations cutting costs, IT teams are perennially understaffed. And those on staff already have frayed nerves working through several emergencies any given day. Backup systems can be complex to deploy and keep running. It requires staff, training and the right expertise. Using a service means these personnel are effectively outsourced too. As opposed to a team of 3-5 members, an organization may be able to manage with as little as half a headcount if using a reliable BaaS.

Future-Proof

BaaS is a great way to hedge against hardware obsolescence. Unlike on-premise hardware which can become old, obsolete, become unsupported, good BaaS solutions usually assure customers of cutting edge compute, network and storage systems. It is in the interest of the BaaS vendor to stay on top of their game for performance and competitive reasons and old customers get the same benefits of the hardware upgrades a BaaS vendor makes to gain new customers.

Also, BaaS software subscriptions usually include technical support and built-in updates and upgrades. When you buy on-premise software the purchase is usually non-SaaS (i.e. a perpetual license model), in which case the technical support, updates and upgrades will be charged additionally in the form of an Annual Maintenance Contract.

Opex vs CapEx

Another important factor – is how the companies get to classify the expense.

Financial divisions of many companies are now espousing a model that reduces Capital investment in favor of Operational expenses. In such scenarios where common sense dictates that leasing is better than buying – businesses prefer to subscribe to a BaaS rather than pay for the Backup Server hardware and associated license costs.

Reliability

BaaS solutions generally have a higher commitment towards SLAs and reliability. They are backed by world-class infrastructure and personnel who make it their business to keep things up and running. It is not uncommon for them to promise 99.9% or even higher # of 9s in terms of reliability. A related benefit is redundancy and failover.

Backup systems, just like anything else mission critical will need redundancy. Building redundancy can be expensive from both a hardware and software standpoint. Buying two of everything or investing in clustering software in non-trivial – not to mention that this adds a few more wrinkles into an already complex system. BaaS solutions usually offer redundancy as a matter of course. Instead of standing up a server for each customer, SaaS based Backup services will most likely have a farm of servers and storage into which they onboard each customer as a 'tenant'. The compute and storage farm in most cases offers redundancy that's far superior to what an organization might be able to individually afford.



Elasticity

BaaS solutions are naturally elastic. If you increase your backup workload, the services will automatically expand to accommodate your needs. If your backup tenant needs more CPU, disk, memory or other resources, they get auto-allocated. No need to plan for hardware purchases, wait for approvals, work with procurement and wait several months for hardware to arrive and get configured.

Let's not forget Security

I think everyone will agree that at this time, security is more important than ever. Professional grade BaaS solutions have strong cyber-security experts behind their solution, combined with strong physical security measures provided by their data center partners.

Good BaaS solutions are hosted in world-class data centers with certifications from external auditors. Certifications like ISO 27001, SOC2 type 2, PCI-DSS etc. are not uncommon, and it is important that the data centers have such certifications. Usually, these certifications are of a higher level or grade than a typical medium size business will be able to afford the time or expense for.

SaaS based solutions have also forced business to change their security stance to rely more on Zero Trust based security rather than traditional security models based on perimeter protection. Zero Trust is a more robust approach which relies on centralized authentication, augmented with multi-factor methods, while reducing the attack surface using principle of least privilege.

Geographical availability

One more natural advantage of a BaaS solution is geographical availability.

If you have a distributed workforce, standing up backup servers in multiple locations can be quite daunting. A business may only have 2-3 large offices which have data center or computer room capabilities. But not every sales office across the world might. Backing up data from users in such locations can be challenging from a hardware and network standpoint.

Also, as employees have started working from home, making do with on-premise backup servers become increasingly clumsy and insecure. These servers now have to be placed in the DMZ, hardened for security and configured to allow in data streams from outside the network perimeter. If security hardening isn't adequate, this can inadvertently open up a vector for a malware attack.

Having a SaaS based backup which can provide global points of presence means every employee is an equal opportunity user – whether they work in headquarters, from home, or in a remote office in the field.

Offsite backups

And, you achieve offsite backups without even trying.

One of the big reasons to do backups is to make an offsite copy to protect against any physical disasters. A BaaS by its very nature, being a cloud-based backup – give businesses an offsite copy. You can stop worrying about tapes, offsite media location services, media rotation and all that fun stuff.



The Objections

The objections one usually hears are the following, but almost none of them hold water.

Cost

BaaS solutions are generally viewed as more expensive. If you do a straight comparison of costs in terms of purchasing hardware versus paying for the services in the cloud, it is true that a BaaS backup might optically appear to be more expensive. But what some IT decision makers don't factor in are the hidden costs – power, cooling, network bandwidth impact, personnel and training costs, hardware obsolescence, etc. And if all of these costs are not met, it could result in non-availability of data when you need it most.

Sunk Hardware Costs

Another argument I hear often is “but we already have the hardware...”. But once a customer goes down that path, they will keep upgrading or buying more hardware and be stuck in the same trap. They'll just be throwing good money after bad. If they believe that BaaS is a better approach, then there is no better time to make the switch than right now – and find another use for that hardware.

Quicker Restores

It is true that recovering data from the cloud could be slower than from on-premise storage. That is the nature of the beast – and I kind of buy into this argument. But there are several ways to hedge against this. One is to simply keep a local backup copy on-premise. Solutions like Parablu's BluVault allow a dual-copy option. Keep a local copy for fast restores, and cloud copy for geographical redundancy. Have your cake and eat it too.

Regulatory compliance

This is perhaps the only real reason a business may be compelled to stay with an on-premise backup solution. Until regulations catch up with technology.

At Parablu, we also provide an easy way to transition from your on-premise backup workloads to our SaaS. We allow you to mix and match workloads while still allowing you to have control

with a central management console. And customers can transition over time, at their own pace – as they retire their existing hardware or find other uses for it. We call this Bespoke BaaS – a unique offering that no other BaaS vendor offers.

A sound backup strategy should be a critical part of every organization's Information Technology plan. BaaS offerings have come a long way and offer indisputable advantages. I hope this blog has been helpful in laying out the factors one should consider before making this decision. Work through all options before you make your choice.

Parablu's BluVault is designed to enable robust data backup from user endpoints, SaaS workloads (Microsoft 365) and edge servers. Our patented integration with Microsoft 365 and OneDrive for Business also means that you can deploy BluVault without spending a penny for backup storage. Sound interesting? Reach out to us and learn more.

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