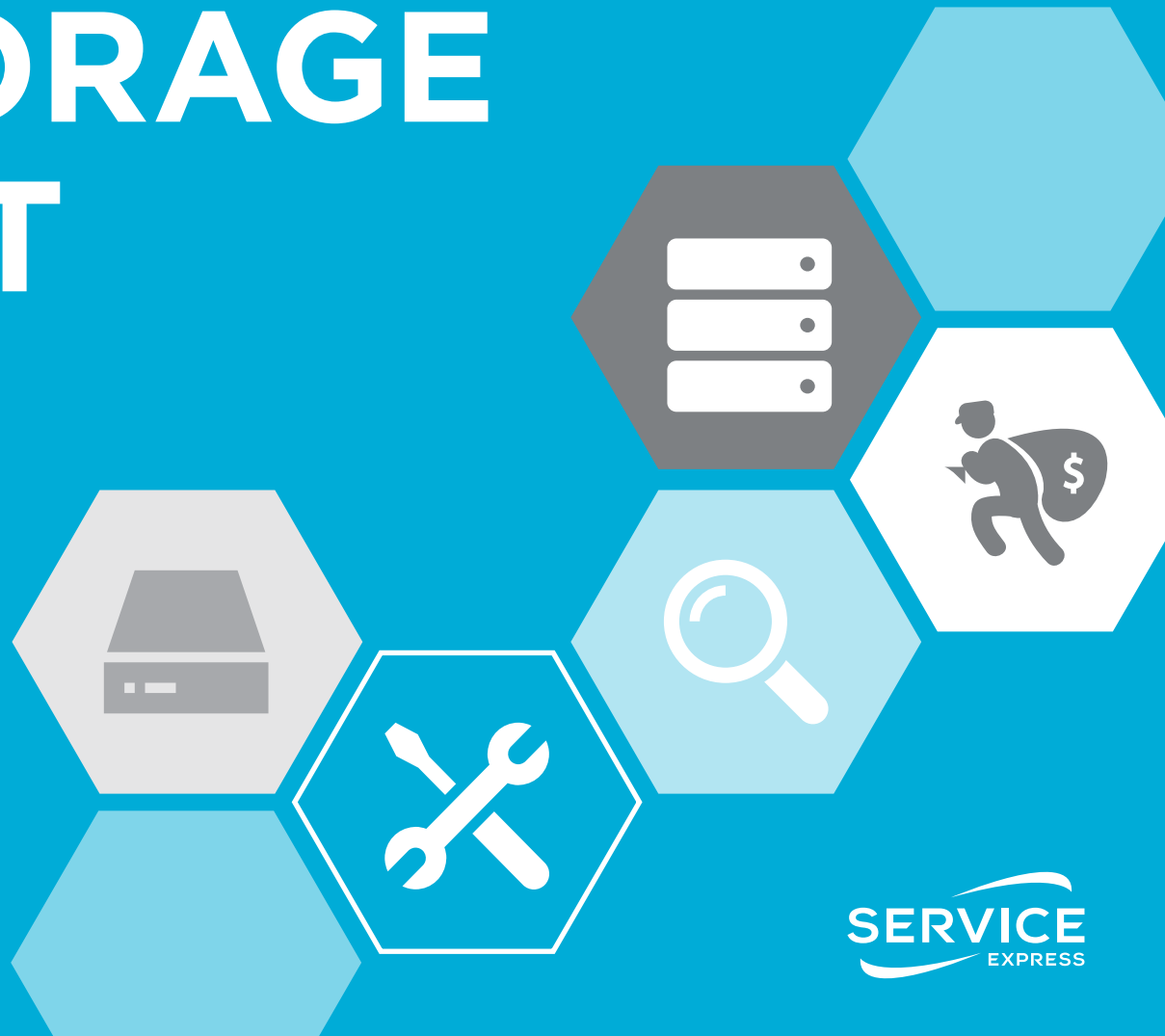# SHEDDING LIGHT ON
OEM STORAGE SUPPORT

| Fact or Fiction?

Introduction

Managing the performance of your storage systems is a critical task that must be done effectively to organize and protect your information while maximizing your investment. Finding the right equipment is key and when the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) sells you a storage solution that is up to the task, the initial experience can be smooth sailing. As the warranty expiration date nears, however, you may encounter rougher seas. There could be a persistent call to replace your storage with the latest release, regardless of how your equipment is performing for you. Perhaps there's certain strong-arm techniques being used to push you towards buying brand-new storage equipment.

It's not difficult to understand why the OEM seems to be the only option for your storage support solutions. The best way to combat the one-option-only illusion is to educate yourself. The following fact-finding mission will help you rethink OEM and third-party maintenance (TPM) storage options to ensure you are making the best decision for you and your company.

Six OEM "facts" to look at in a new light

1 Don't extend warranty support; it's better to buy new.

2 It's time to buy new when equipment is End-of-Life or End-of-Support-Life.

3 Only the OEM can make updates to storage software.

4 Support is always provided by an OEM engineer.

5 OEM engineers are trained storage experts with insider knowledge.

6 The best service delivery is provided by the OEM.

1

"When your storage maintenance contract expires, the smart money is on upgrading to brand-new equipment instead of shouldering the high cost of post-warranty support."

fact | OEM storage maintenance can be prohibitively expensive and can often make buying new equipment a more attractive option. However, all maintenance pricing is not created equal.

Consider this:

The OEM is in the business of selling hardware. OEMs are motivated to continuously sell you new storage, not to encourage you to hold onto older, working gear. This may explain why post-warranty storage costs spike sharply after your three-year contract runs its course. In contrast, buying new may seem like a reasonable and financially sound choice.

The cost of a new enterprise-level system is incredibly high. There's endless research and quality built into storage equipment, which also makes it a good candidate for a longer lifecycle. To avoid choosing

between high maintenance costs or an even higher purchase price, you owe it to yourself to look outside of your most obvious choice (the OEM) for reliable storage support.

You can keep your current storage environment an additional four-to-six years for pennies on the dollar by moving your service maintenance to a TPM provider.

According to Forrester, 80% of people are unaware that there are alternatives to OEM maintenance. Make sure you belong to the 20% who have vetted all options when it comes to storage support.

Takeaway:

You can **avoid the high cost** of post-warranty OEM maintenance without compromising service or reliability by using a TPM provider.

80%
of people are unaware that there are alternatives to OEM maintenance

SERVICE EXPRESS

2

"You must upgrade to new storage equipment once your current hardware reaches EOL or EOSL."

fact According to Gartner, the useful life of storage hardware is 7-10 years.

Consider this:

Let's start by taking a look at how the OEM uses the terms End-of-Life (EOL) and End-of-Service-Life (EOSL). EOL and EOSL both indicate the OEM's move away from **selling and servicing** an existing system. As equipment goes EOL or EOSL, the OEM wants to switch you over to new gear, because its business model rests squarely on the sale of new hardware.

You can look at EOL and EOSL another way too. End-of-Life can also mean End-of-Development (EOD) - meaning that the equipment is typically in a stable release. The bugs are fixed, no future updates are needed. And End-of-Service-Life specifically means that the OEM has a fixed date when it will no longer offer its own high-priced version of support.

And while the OEM may caution you about parts availability for EOL and EOSL equipment, the fact is that TPM providers have multiple resource channels and supply lines to ensure access to the right parts that will keep you up and running. TPM providers meticulously test refurbished parts to deliver reliable hard drives, service processors, controllers, power supplies, air movement devices, and many other commonly replaced components.

Takeaway:

You can extend the life of your EOL and EOSL storage equipment without losing performance or increasing downtime by using a TPM provider at a fraction of OEM costs.

Due to all the moving parts in storage, it would appear to follow that the older a unit is the less reliable it is – untrue! Drives are the most replaced piece of hardware in storage, so you can expect them to fail. But failure rates increase slowly as equipment ages. So at year eight, you can expect a similar rate of failure in your devices as you would at year three. Using experience and log histories, a TPM provider can proactively identify problematic drives and replace them to avoid disruptions. For most storage systems, proper maintenance means you can count on the same level of reliability throughout its operational life.

Eventually you will need to make a change to keep pace with growth or OS compatibility. The good news is that you can still avoid the high cost of purchasing the latest storage system. You can choose to upgrade or go with a newer (not the newest) generation that improves capacity and speed at a fraction of a brand-new unit price.

✓

If your equipment is nearing or in an EOL/EOSL phase, it does not mean you are without support options and must replace it.

the useful life of hardware is

7-10 years
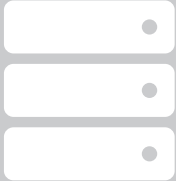
Bonus Takeaway:

When the business need exists and you choose to replace your storage equipment, you can avoid extra decommissioning costs charged by the OEM. TPM providers often offer Asset Recovery services that include convenient pick up and secure disposal of retired equipment for little to no charge.

3

"Software updates are always essential and should always be installed by the OEM."

fact Software updates aren't always required to keep your storage equipment running smoothly. And though the OEM releases the updates, different parties can apply the updates for you.

Software/firmware/microcode concerns loom large for most data center admins. Perhaps you have even considered a TPM provider, but your biggest reservation is losing access to patches and/or software upgrades for your storage should you move away from the OEM. To put the software access question in the proper perspective, you should ask yourself the following questions:

✓

Can I still obtain software/firmware/microcode updates if I choose to go with TPM for my storage maintenance?

In most cases, as the equipment owner, you can still legally obtain updates for your storage environment. If not, the TPM provider will work with you to find a solution to access updates. This can sometimes come in the form of OEM VARs that can legally provide access to said updates through their partner relationship with the OEM. It is often the case that having a maintenance contract with the OEM is not required to legally obtain these updates. To determine your access, a TPM provider would review your storage environment and advise you accordingly.

✓

Do I need the latest level of software/firmware/microcode?

While there are legitimate reasons for being at the latest software/firmware/microcode—bug fixes, security concerns, need for compatibility with other pieces of the data infrastructure—there may be no real benefit to being on "the bleeding edge" of release levels for storage. Frequently new versions are not being released for equipment that has moved beyond OEM factory warranty. Many releases are put out solely for the ability to use new features or new types of hardware. If your environment is stable and not overly dynamic, then most times software/firmware/microcode updates are a moot point. This does not discount the need to address security concerns or usability issues, but other updates may not be necessary for you to continue using your existing storage environment.

Can TPM provide the level of expertise needed to do the "deep dive" type of analysis needed if an update were to cause an issue?

TPM engineer skill levels vary, but there are those who take the time to thoroughly vet and plan for supporting a product. These TPM engineers stay informed of known issues, bugs, technical bulletins, etc. Relationships with OEM VARs allow TPM providers to escalate to the same back-end, high-level support available for OEM field service engineers.

In short, a TPM provider may very well be just as effective or sometimes more so at handling tough problems and unusual issues with storage array updates. A reputable, quality TPM provider will make sure they have the processes in place to allow for the really deep issues to be worked to resolution, even if it requires escalation to a partner or the OEM.

Safety and security patches are always accessible

Takeaway:

Updates are often available even without an OEM warranty or maintenance contract coverage. These updates are not always necessary, however, especially for a storage product that is in a stable, established environment. Don't be afraid to ask specific questions—no two scenarios are exactly the same, but you may find TPM service is a viable option once you know all the facts about software/firmware/microcode availability and necessity.

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"Support is always provided by an OEM engineer."

fact OEMs often employ contract workers to maintain their equipment. You may already have first-hand experience with a non-OEM engineer.

Consider this:

You might be suprised to learn that the actual number of OEM-employed service engineers is quite low. To keep their own costs down, the OEMs may farm out a majority of their break/fix issues to contract engineers. The experience these contract engineers have with the gear may be limited, as well as their ability to resolve more complex problems.

Translation: You may not be getting service from an OEM engineer, but you are still paying premium OEM rates.

If the OEM is comfortable engaging non-OEM engineers to keep your storage equipment running, it would follow that there is less risk to you in considering an alternative means of support (and cost) for reliable storage maintenance.

Takeaway:

Ask the question – why pay a premium for service that is available to you for less?

5

"OEM service engineers are specially trained storage experts with exclusive insider knowledge."

fact | OEM "factory training" does not equate to "better support."

If your support engineer is an OEM employee (not a sub-contract engineer), his/her technical expertise does not automatically reflect a greater level of knowledge or skill. By prioritizing the development and sale of new equipment, OEMs tend to invest less in training and resources for support. Executing top-notch service can take a back seat to sales.

For engineers who can bring additional skills and experience to the table, you should be looking for a company with a business model that focuses on service. Downtime is too costly to go with second-best. Which is why with reputable TPM providers, your engineer not only has the ability, but also the extensive internal resources to successfully support a variety of OEM equipment.

Why does a comprehensive approach to problem-solving matter? It cuts down on delays. A service call is placed. An OEM engineer is only authorized to fix problems within certain parameters. If the cause of the problem is in question, time is wasted on deciding who

will fix it. If the problem is with another brand of gear, the OEM engineer cannot step up. In contrast, a TPM engineer is empowered to solve a broader range of issues that fall into the "gray area." Downtime is the common enemy and all efforts are directed on returning you to a fully operational status.

Takeaway:

Training and experience build expertise. When you're comparing your options, don't hesitate to ask specifics. What type of storage training and experience does the OEM and the third-party professional have that can benefit your data center?

"For the best in service delivery, you should always choose the OEM."

fact This may have been true back in the '90s, but times have changed.

Consider this:

As you compare the pricing breakdown between the OEM and a TPM provider, you may wonder what the savings will cost you in terms of service and reliability. The substantial cost difference is only part of a true comparison. The difference in the approach and the service of your storage maintenance is also significantly different.

To recap:

- OEMs focus on selling you new equipment at regular intervals.
- TPM providers focus on maintaining your post-warranty OEM server, storage and network equipment.

In the data center, you need more than just a cost advantage. You need service that translates into less downtime, fewer headaches and more flexibility to meet the demands you're facing.

Takeaway:

It's possible for you to find a cost-effective storage maintenance solution without sacrificing service.

TPM providers can offer you creative, cost-effective options

Be a fact finder!

Don't buy into the mindset that there is only one option that fits your data center storage needs.

In reality, third-party maintenance offers you a practical and beneficial alternative to standard OEM solutions. Before signing onto a brand-new storage equipment upgrade, base your decision on knowledge and analysis – take a second look at all of your options.

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