Understanding Existing Processes

One of the common misconceptions about tape management is that everybody manages their tapes in the exact same way. While there may be some commonality to the way most people manage their tapes, there is always some twist that makes each enterprise unique.

It is also rare for each enterprise to have a full comprehension of how tapes are being managed, and even where there are written SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures), it is usual for the actual processes to adhere exactly to the SOP.

To make matters worse, each tape management stake-holder often has a different perspective of who is managing, what, from where, and with what tools. There is also often a misconception of what the various tools in the backup/tape management tool chain do.

For instance, the operations manager might believe that most of the process is automated, while the operations staff are manually ejecting tapes from each tape robot using the backup software GUI, and an email that is sent to them from script that nobody supports anymore.

It is therefore critical to bring together each of the tape management stake-holders and create a basic workflow of the tape management processes.

Such a workflow might look like this:

1. Backups commence at 2am each weeknight.
2. A script is run from an AIX machine that determines which backups were created over the last 24 hours.
3. The script sends an email to the operations group email address.
4. The operators use the email to manually eject each of the tapes from the robot.
5. Once ejected, the operators logon to the off-site vendor's web portal.
6. The operators manually type the Volume-ID, and expiry date and a description into the portal.
7. The tapes are placed into a Turtle Transport Case.
8. The off-site vendor comes every day at 2 pm, collects the transport case and returns a case full of all tapes that have met the expiry dates previously entered.
9. The off-site vendor gives the operators a paper receipt which is filed in a filing cabinet. There is a folder for each month.
10. The operators open the returned transport case and lookup each tape in the backup software to determine if it is a scratch tape or if it still contains live data.
11. If the tape contains live data, it is placed in a storage rack.
12. If it is a scratch tape it is entered in to the tape library, but only if there is space.
13. If there is insufficient free space in the tape library, the excess tapes are placed in a rack called the Scratch Rack.
14. The operators then ensure there are at least 50 scratch tapes in the tape library.
15. If there are insufficient scratch tapes in the tape library, the operators will eject any tape marked as full and place it in the storage rack.
16. The operators will then move the required number of tapes from the scratch rack to the tape library.

If the enterprise has multiple locations using tapes, the process may differ at each location. It is therefore recommended that once a process has been documented, that the process be shared with all other locations so that they can register any differences in their own process.

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