



10GbE will make iSCSI a very viable alternative to fibre channel, says Intransa CEO, Tom Alexander.

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As demand for IP SAN gains momentum in India and globally, Intransa, one of the few IP SAN players in the country is all set to roll out solutions addressing multiple segments. Armed with the cost advantages and simplicity of IP based solutions, the company is making headway in the high potential, mid-range markets. With 10GbE round the corner, Intransa looks at leveraging iSCSI to provide high performance storage solutions. Tom Alexander, CEO, Intransa, in a discussion with CIOL, highlights the company's new focus areas and the advantages of using IP based storage solutions. Excerpts from the interview:

CIOL: What is your vision for Intransa over the next 18 months?

Tom Alexander: Intransa is in a position of strength. There is a market for our technology and we are benefiting from its growth. Intransa's unique network-centric architecture squarely addresses the CIO's pain points around better asset utilization, data protection, simplified management, and reduced TCO. Going forward, you will see us offer solutions that address multiple segments.

Our architecture is very well suited for extraordinary high performance, so you can expect us to be present when 10GbE infrastructure is introduced. We will continue to round out the entry and mid-range markets, focusing on cost and simplicity while providing great performance.

Furthermore, I see Intransa participating in new exciting areas. For example, blade servers could represent a significant opportunity. Imagine blade servers that can be converted to Intransa enabled Storage Controllers providing excellent bandwidth to applications that need it, then later in the day, converting back to the application processors executing another task. The point is that our technology, especially around our StorControl software is very extensible and our plan is to find creative means to make this technology ubiquitous, delivering more flexibility, simplified management, better asset utilization, and hence, lower cost of ownership to more customers.

Second, while we've had great success in India and are the only emerging IP SAN company to have a global presence, my vision is to have a very strong presence in the US market.

Third, I further see us working closely, throughout the world with reseller partners, be they OEM or VAR. The channel is very important to us.

Lastly, I want Intransa to be one of the most sought after places to work, attracting and retaining top talent. This means being innovative and creative in what we do because people want to work for a leading company where smart minds come together to deliver real solutions that satisfy real business problems better than anyone else.

CIOL: What strategies would Intransa adopt to drive further into the iSCSI/IP space?

TA: There is already strong demand for iSCSI. The economics, simplicity, cost and ubiquity of IP make it a natural fit. Our segmented marketing approach allows us to package the right solutions for the right customer. I think that 10GbE will strongly change the perceptions of performance, making iSCSI a very viable alternative to fibre channel leading to more wide spread adoption into enterprise use cases. At the lower end of the market expect to see us managing third party iSCSI bricks, bringing the benefit of easier manageability and performance.

I really think that fibre channel faces some challenges at the lower end of the market. The SMB space never made the leap to fibre channel and we expect to see wide spread iSCSI adoption based again on simple economics and ease of use. Packaging simple solutions that can be easily configured by our VAR partners will be a focus area.

Intransa entered into a licensing arrangement with HCL here in India. This represents a significant channel opportunity for us to expand the reach of iSCSI making shared storage available to a whole set of new customers. This constitutes just another proof point as to the extensibility of the Intransa technology.

The strategy that we have adopted, network-centric with IP-to-the-disk, drives us further into the iSCSI/IP space than anyone else in the market. It is our point of differentiation. We are in the network and can better leverage the network and advancements in IP. It is always better to be a node on the network than to be hanging off of a node in the network.

CIOL: As a tiered storage approach demands multiple device types, each cost-effectively performing its respective storage duties. What is Intransa doing in this area?

TA: Many customers are looking to use iSCSI today as secondary storage or fixed content. We see customers implementing a disk to disk to tape strategy and our products can fit in very well into this strategy as customers move from expensive disks to our SATA based disks. I do think that with advancements made in iSCSI, especially on the performance side with 10GbE and SAS drive technology that more customers will be looking to iSCSI as a means to storing primary data.

Hence, we could easily see customers using iSCSI for both primary and secondary data storage requirements. In fact, Intransa is looking to support VTL (Virtual Tape Library) to assist with disk-to-disk back up.

For customers with a fibre channel infrastructure, iSCSI fits as a complementary technology in a tiered-access strategy. iSCSI enables access to networked storage, to servers that might never have been connected if not for the significantly lower cost of connecting to a SAN.

On the one hand, a fibre channel SAN is well suited for the high performance and functionality of the higher tiers, and can justify the expense to connect and maintain a select number of servers to a high performance storage network. On the other hand, iSCSI is a better fit in first tiers with greater economies of scale, ease of use and the ability to bring more servers into the SAN than would otherwise be possible.

For the enterprise, it is no longer a question of either fibre channel or iSCSI. They are enabling technologies that work hand-in-hand as complementary technologies that fit together in a tiered enterprise.

CIOL: Users generally have difficulty in assessing the value of the right backup and archival system. How can Intransa's IP-SAN help them decide what's best for them?

TA: It is really all about education, awareness and Intransa being seen as a trusted advisor. Intransa uses building blocks that can scale up very easily. Users aren't constrained by a traditional monolithic architecture meaning they can scale performance and capacity independently. Our pre-sales support engineers and partners are very skilled in looking at a customer's environment and 'dialing' in to the right solution at a much more granular and precise way than the competition.

Also, what makes the best backup or archival system can change over time, as needs change. The Intransa IP-SAN is flexible with independent scalability of performance and capacity. So a customer is free to configure a system that meets their needs now and adapt as their requirements change, without the worry of having chosen 'the best' solution in advance and without having to predict how their requirements might change in the future.

CIOL: Information Classification and Management (ICM) software solutions are set to become the brains of the next-generation data management infrastructure. What is your strategy in this area?

TA: Intransa will play within the Information Life Cycle Management, where data will already have been tagged and routed to the appropriate storage architecture, with Intransa representing a "target class". We will largely depend upon the hosts, based upon metadata triggers to direct data and on policy to our storage systems. We don't, at least as of yet, see ourselves engaged in 'intelligent routing' within the data path.

Additionally, our Quality of Service (QoS) features allow an Intransa Realm to be configured for different classes of service (from archival storage to higher performance storage). This tiered class of storage can serve as the target of where data is moved based on ICM.

CIOL: How can ICM solutions meet the challenges in managing unstructured data facing large enterprises?

TA: We don't claim to be experts in ICM or how meta-data servers will respond to unstructured data flows in determining data flows. Instead we see ourselves as the target side of the equation as per the previous question. Intransa's intelligence is very much focused on virtualization of storage and RAID support and not upon data routing manipulation based upon data tagging.

Nevertheless, an ICM solution of unstructured data can automatically migrate lower priority data (as it becomes older and less frequently accessed) onto an Intransa backup or archival system and free up Tier 1 high performance, high availability storage resources of a large enterprise for newer data or higher priority data.

CIOL: Greater storage efficiency continues to be an urgent priority for every enterprise, and SAS (serial attached SCSI) is uniquely positioned to facilitate this key goal. How do you see its role evolving?

TA: We will continue to stay current, understanding every opportunity available to maximize system performance while staying true to price performance targets for each segment. We clearly see the advantages that SAS can bring in the performance sensitive segment, especially with the introduction of 10GbE.

CIOL: Pl. update us on your recent wins in India and how do you estimate this market going forward.

TA: We are very pleased with customer acceptance of our products in India and we see continued positive growth. Most of the customers that have deployed an IP SAN are using it to compliment their fibre channel storage. They are doing this for all the reasons I've mentioned including ease of deployment, cost and ease of administration.

We are in four locations of HCL Technologies, seven locations at Mphasis, three at Spice Telecom and Intransa is also present at Wipro Spetramind, L &T, Quintiles, Aditya Birla, Spice Telecom, Rediff, Sun Pharma and Madacom, to name a few.

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