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SGI brings federated data archive product to the U.S.

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[SGI Inc.](#) this week began worldwide distribution of a software platform that offers a unified view of unstructured data objects across an enterprise, from live applications to data archives created with its tiered data storage tools.

SGI has been selling the LiveArc platform in the Asia-Pacific market, and Tuesday said it would begin selling it worldwide as part of its InfiniteStorage Total Control Suite. SGI has an exclusive distribution for the software, developed as [Mediaflux](#) by an Australian company called Arcitecta Pty Ltd. It uses binary (compressed) XML to create a metadata index for unstructured data objects regardless of their native metadata format, which can then be searched for a unified view of all data in the enterprise.

LiveArc spans data and records management for production applications as well as [data archives](#) within the storage infrastructure. Floyd Christofferson, SGI business development manager for media and entertainment, said LiveArc's current deployments focus on libraries of reference data such as images that need to be accessed from different points within an organization. Use cases include producers looking for reference images within different collections of assets for a film project and medical research organizations working in environments that may not share medical images or other metadata.

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SGI is also bringing LiveArc to market with data archive integration into its DMF hierarchical storage management (HSM) tool, which offers a unified file system view of data stored in disk and tape-based data archives. LiveArc can then be used to allow enterprise-wide search that includes production data, active data archives, and long-term data archives stored on tape media.

"In many cases you may have a storage environment trying to bridge multiple silos, and collaboration and management across them is difficult," Christofferson said. "LiveArc can abstract them all to the metadata layer and allow flexibility because it doesn't require one specific metadata schema. This means the IT manager can manage his infrastructure, however, it's most efficient with online and offline assets, without having to re-tailor information for each specific use case."

LiveArc also tracks versions of data and creates an audit trail of changes to the metadata, and includes a Web services platform that can be used to create custom applications through SGI professional services. As a services play, LiveArc could be used to create a comprehensive compliance or [eDiscovery](#) data archive, but Christofferson said the focus is mainly on unstructured data without a compliance or litigation focus.

Federation expanding in data archiving, records management and eDiscovery products

Another product released this week, [ZL Technologies' Unified Archive 7](#), also provides new ways to work with data collected from multiple repositories. ZL focuses on eDiscovery and litigation. Unified Archive 7 offers the ability to create data maps, as well as perform analytics and reporting, across multiple data types, including email, file shares, instant messages and SharePoint. ZL CEO Kon Leong said the product's new search algorithms give customers a graphical view of data sets and perform new

types of searches to find more relevant data for eDiscovery purposes. For example, users can highlight a paragraph within a document turned up in an initial eDiscovery search and search across the ZL data archive for paragraphs like it that may be relevant, even if the same keywords do not appear.

ZL's federation sits at a level of the data management hierarchy below what SGI offers in LiveArc – in other words, LiveArc could be used to search an environment which contains ZL's data archive, but not the other way around.

"Most customers want one consolidated logical repository," Leong said. "We can consolidate and virtualize as many [storage systems] as you want, but it's all under our control." He argued unified repository management makes data protection and other aspects of data management within the environment simpler.

While "federation" is a word being tossed around frequently with regard to newer data archive products (EMC Corp. also used it earlier this month to refer to the pooling of multiple heterogeneous physical devices with the [Centera Virtual Archive](#)), there's wide variability in the level of federation being offered with different tools.

Forrester Research analyst Brian Hill said he's seen federation begin to catch on in the records management market, at least where retaining records from multiple sources is concerned. "I see people turning to search-in place for legacy repositories that might be too large or take too long to move into a new environment," he said. "Organizations centralizing all their data into one uber archive aren't many, and a sense of where data is distributed across the organization is very important from an e-Discovery perspective."

However, whether these efforts to unify data management processes will be effective is another matter, the analysts said. "I'm always dubious when I see someone say they can support everything," he said. A unified view "is an appealing idea, but I have yet to see anyone fully deliver on that promise."

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