

IT Department Runs Smooth Storage as-a-Service Test Drive

Dell Digital gains efficiencies as Customer Zero of the new Dell Technologies APEX Data Storage Services offering



Business needs

Dell Technologies' internal IT organization needed to free its staff from routine infrastructure operations and maintenance and become more agile and flexible in order to respond to rapidly changing needs. They wanted to assess the capabilities of APEX Data Storage Services to drive their IT transformation.

Business results

- Decreases the time from ordering through installation of new storage from 3 months to less than 1 month
- Eliminates the need for long-cycle capacity modeling and planning
- Enables capacity monitoring and adjustment of capacity levels as needed, on demand
- Frees staff time from change management and upgrade tasks
- Enables easy development of a chargeback process

Customer profile

Dell Digital

Information Technology | United States



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Dell Digital

Solutions at a glance

- APEX Data Storage Services

APEX Data Storage Services Debuts in Dell Technologies' Own Data Center

Serving as Customer Zero for Dell Technologies' APEX Data Storage Services subscription offer is more than just a testing exercise for Dell Digital, Dell Technologies' IT organization. Like Dell's large enterprise IT technology customers, Dell Digital is striving to free its IT experts from the tasks of day-to-day infrastructure operation and maintenance to focus on higher value priorities.

So when Dell Technologies deployed the APEX Data Storage Services offering to a Dell Digital production data center in Q1 of 2021 as part of a private preview of this initial APEX offering, James Hall, Senior Consultant – Core Infrastructure Engineering within Dell Digital, says his team was excited to be an initial adopter. "It's clear that APEX will transform the way storage can be procured, deployed and maintained within a large enterprise environment," he says.



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APEX Data Storage Services is the first in a portfolio of elastic, outcome-based IT services which allow customers to pay only for what they use, with the ability to scale up and down as needed. This offer provides on-premises infrastructure that is owned and maintained by Dell Technologies but controlled and operated by the customer. The APEX Console enables easy management of APEX as-a-Service resources. APEX offers are designed for operational expense (OpEx) treatment.¹

Dell Digital ran test workloads on APEX Data Storage Services and offered feedback on the process and how the solution fits in a broader ecosystem. In Hall's evaluation, APEX Data Storage Services have great potential to add simplicity and agility to Dell Digital operations in the future. Says Hall, "We definitely see some new efficiencies coming from capacity management, performance management and the ability to pay for what we use."

1. (OpEx treatment is subject to customer internal accounting review and policies.)

Delivered in 14 days

Like any customer, Dell Digital began its APEX transaction by specifying the storage capacity it wanted – 50 terabytes – and then configuring the specific environment needed to host it. Storage Solutions Engineering worked with the product, deployment, storage and IT cybersecurity teams to provision space and power within the data center, create the external network configuration and establish security rules.

APEX Data Storage Services infrastructure arrived and was deployed in Dell's data center within 14 days, the service level objective for delivery and full deployment. Says Hall, "I've estimated that, all other things being equal, APEX would decrease the time from ordering through installing new storage from the three months it takes today to under one month.

"It's all been a good experience," Hall says, "the delivery, the deployment, and the integration within the data center. And with the APEX Console, we have great visibility into our storage utilization. Dell Digital is testing and learning how APEX Data Storage Services saves us time and effort with capacity management, performance monitoring, change management and upgrading mechanics."

With APEX Data Storage Services, the deployed infrastructure automatically includes buffer capacity, which eliminates any chance of under-provisioning. The infrastructure can be expanded and upgraded with no planned downtime. Dell Digital expects to test the expansion capacity by adding another appliance to the system to see how it scales.

Being our own subscriber

In a longstanding tradition of "drinking our own Champagne," Dell Digital often serves as a first consumer of new Dell technology in its IT operations. But why would Dell Digital subscribe to Dell's own Storage as-a-Service offering?

"With APEX Data Storage Services, we're seeking to address the same business needs as our external customers," says Hall.

Besides freeing up its team members for higher value tasks and paying only for capacity it uses, Dell Digital sees many other potential benefits from the as-a-Service model. Dell Digital pays for its own storage equipment, and the option of moving to an OpEx accounting model as opposed to the traditional CapEx (capital expense) model is significant. The OpEx model also makes it easier for Dell Digital to establish a chargeback process to bill users for the what they consume – something they've been working toward.

"With the ability to bring services on as needed, we no longer have to worry about building a capacity pipeline," says Hall. "We could just monitor and adjust capacity levels via the APEX Console."

With the APEX offering, added capacity can be delivered and installed quickly as needed. Says Hall, "That means Dell Digital would have to spend less time predicting and modelling our data center capacity needs. Today, it's a long cycle time to design, procure and deploy new storage capacity. With APEX Data Storage Services, Dell Digital will gain speed in the time that it takes to get new capacity and cost efficiency in only having to pay for what we use.

"On the cost front, APEX Data Storage Services should enable more operational consistency across our storage estate and lead to better outcomes for the business and the teams that depend on our infrastructure. We recently found that up to 30% of our engineers' time is spent on administrative tasks. Being able to free them of these tasks will let them focus on adding capabilities on our roadmap without having to procure additional resources."



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More value ahead

As APEX evolves to include additional as-a-Service offers, Dell Digital will be able to benefit from maintenance services provided by Dell Technologies – included in the subscription. Instead of having to consume the many Dell services Dell Digital relies on now in various streams across different products, a subscription option would deliver coverage much more efficiently.

Given the benefits we've seen in this first trial run, we're excited to see how APEX progresses across the rest of the infrastructure portfolio," says Hall. "Dell Digital is in early discussions with product teams about the potential of other APEX capabilities and solutions to transform our operations. Our ultimate goal would be to have 100% of Dell Digital's storage, and potentially our compute capacity, delivered via APEX.

"As the APEX portfolio expands and as we seek to procure more of it and expanded variations of it," Hall says, "I think the value proposition is that it frees up our folks from a lot of the work we do to bring something into the data center and lets them focus on the higher order tasks."



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