

STORAGE



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QUALITY AWARDS / NAS



NetApp and Synology sew up top NAS honors

In our tenth Quality Awards NAS survey, a storage pioneer and a relative newcomer come out on top.

BY RICH CASTAGNA

NAS STANDS FOR network attached storage—but it’s also the first three letters of “nasty.” And judging by the tough evaluation standards of our survey respondents, NAS system vendors better sit up and take notice—or run for cover.

The respondents to our 10th [Quality Awards survey](#) for NAS systems, continuing a trend we saw developing last year, were tough critics of their network-attached storage vendors and systems in both the midrange and enterprise categories.

Across the board, scores were down from last year, when we saw some of the lowest marks ever doled out by respondents. It’s likely more a “honeymoon is over” situation than deep-seated disappointment, as the spiraling growth of file data is taxing all types and sizes of NAS boxes in companies big and small. So what we’re seeing is probably more about heightened expectations of network-attached storage system vendors than broad disappointment with the product category.

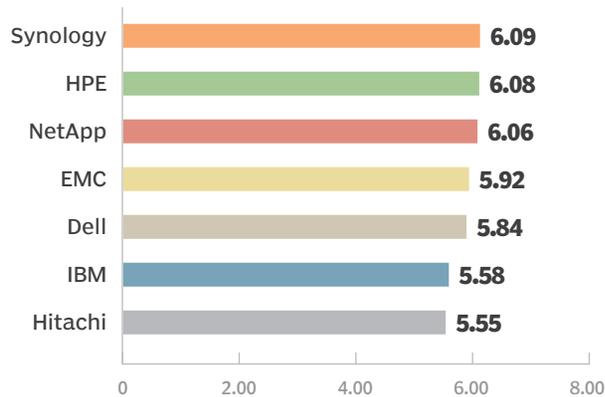
Against that backdrop, we had a couple of very tight races, with NetApp prevailing among enterprise NAS systems and a newcomer—Synology—rising to the top of the midrange class.

Our 505 valid survey responses yielded 616 product evaluations, with six enterprise and seven midrange product lines comprising our finalists in the survey for NAS systems.

Overall Rankings: And the winners are ...

Midrange: The enterprise race was close, but the midrange competition was almost too close to call. The top three vendors—Synology, HPE and NetApp—were separated by .03 points. Synology’s .01 point lead over second-place HPE was as close to a dead heat as you can get. Those three leaders divvied up rating category honors with Synology winning two, HPE snagging one and NetApp coming out on top in the remaining two (tied with EMC in one). Hands-down, this was the closest competition ever among midrange NAS storage systems, but they didn’t stand out relative to past surveys. In fact, the group’s average overall score was the lowest we’ve seen to date across the 10 sets of survey results. The group’s average category scores were either the lowest or second lowest ever.

Midrange NAS: Overall rankings

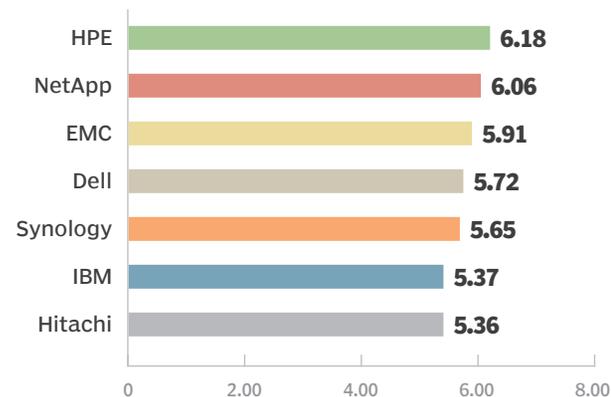


NAS NOTE: Before this survey, the narrowest margin between overall first- and second-place midrange finishers was .11 points.

Sales-Force Competence: Caveat Emptor

Midrange. Looking at the midrange NAS results for sales competence, you can easily conclude that HPE has the customer thing down pat. Of the six statements in this category, HPE broke the tape first for five of them on its way to an average score of 6.18. HPE’s strongest showings were for having a knowledgeable sales support team (6.67) and for reps who understand customers’ businesses (6.24). The lone statement it didn’t win—”My sales rep keeps my interests foremost”—second-place NetApp snagged with a 5.95. NetApp had four 6.0-or-better marks and two just shy of 6.0. EMC’s performance was also relatively consistent with five scores near or above 6.0, and only stumbling a bit on the “My sales rep is easy to negotiate with” statement as did several others in the group.

Midrange NAS: Sales-Force Competence

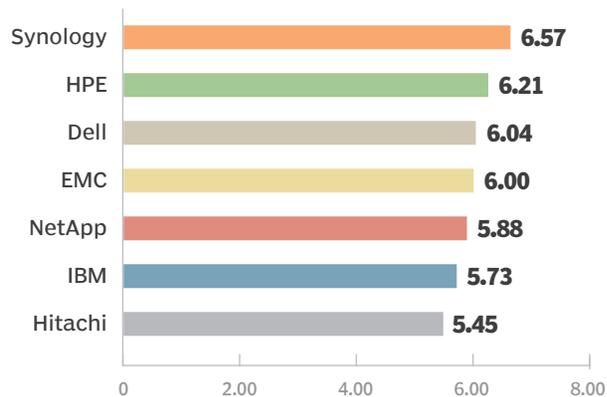


NAS NOTE: The group’s average for the sales category—5.68—tied last year’s lowest-ever score.

Initial Product Quality: Rating the out-of-the-box experience

Midrange. Synology customers are clearly pleased with the quality of the company's products, as the SMB-focused vendor notched a category average of 6.57 by racking up the highest marks for each statement (with one tie). That solid mark was underscored by a pair of 6.77s for installing without defects and products that get up and running quickly. HPE's 6.21 score was good for second place as it tied Synology for user satisfaction with the level of professional services that products require (6.33). HPE was the only vendor in addition to Synology to earn 6.0 or higher marks on all six category statements. Dell (6.04) rounded out the top three, a showing anchored by its best score of 6.30 earned for products that can get up and running quickly.

Midrange NAS: Initial Product Quality

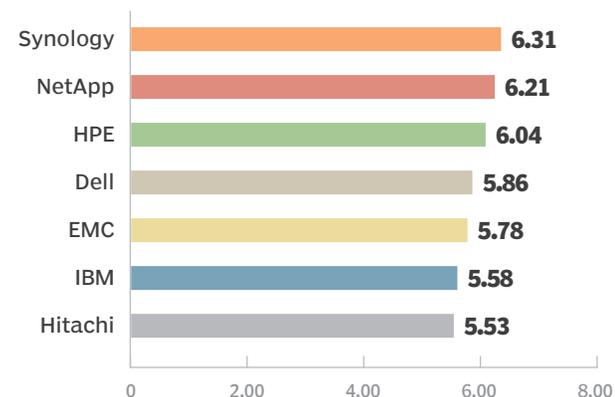


NAS NOTE: As a group, initial quality was midrange systems' best category, with a category average of 5.99.

Product Features: What's under the hood counts

Midrange. Synology matched its initial quality win with a second category victory in the features category to outpace NetApp (6.21) and HPE (6.04). Synology and NetApp were the only vendors to put up 6.0-plus scores for all features rating statements, and they split statement wins with Synology for five and NetApp copping the last two. Synology's strength was highlighted by sterling scores for overall feature satisfaction (6.65), management features (6.46) and snapshotting (6.38). NetApp earned ratings from 6.12 to 6.28, with statement wins for interoperability with other vendors' gear (6.22) and replication features (6.19). Most of HPE's grades were between 5.80 and 5.90, but it fared well for overall satisfaction with its feature sets (6.48) and management capabilities (6.38).

Midrange NAS: Product Features

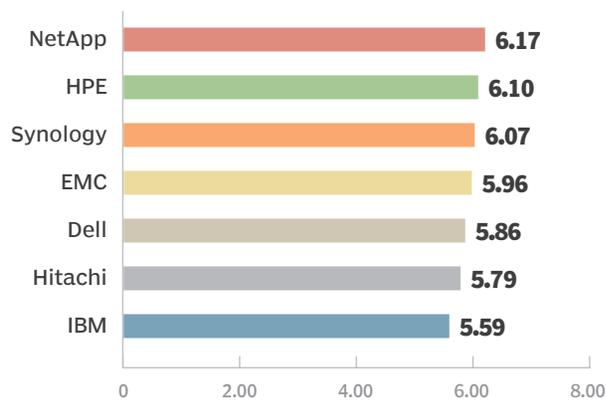


NAS NOTE: Midrange NAS systems typically do well here, but this group's overall average was lower than all but one previous survey.

Reliability: Meeting expectations

Midrange. NetApp (6.17) dominated the reliability category without winning any statements, but scoring above 6.0 on all of them. NetApp flexed its muscles with a 6.32 for products that have very little downtime, and a pair of 6.24s for meeting service levels and requiring few unplanned patches. Second-place HPE (6.10) bucked the group's trend and fared well on the patches statements, with a 6.50 for its patch guidance and 6.45 for non-disruptive patching. Synology stumbled a bit on the non-disruptive patching statement with a 5.32, but still rode into third place with a group high 6.63 for "This product experiences very little downtime" as well as high marks on the service level (6.40) and unplanned patches (6.25) statements.

Midrange NAS: Reliability

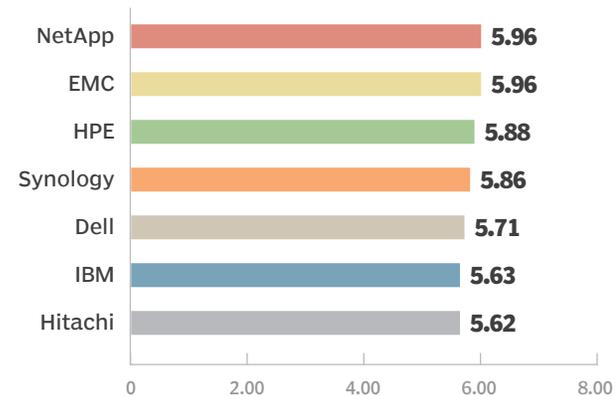


NAS NOTE: Like its enterprise siblings, the midrange group had its worst overall marks on two of the patching statements.

Technical Support: NAS safety nets

Midrange. Scores were low but the competition was high as both NetApp and EMC picked up 5.96 marks. HPE won a couple of statements in rolling up a 5.88 score, while Synology, nipping at HPE's heels, beat the bunch on three statements on the way to a 5.86 rating. NetApp's 6.27 for delivering support per contract was tops; it tied Synology for having knowledgeable third-party partners (6.09) and also tied EMC on taking ownership of problems (6.00). Co-winner EMC added a first for its training (5.97). HPE led for its documentation (6.38) and also prevailed with a 6.29 for its knowledgeable support personnel. Although it finished just out of the top three, DDN had the highest tallies for issues that rarely required escalation (6.19) and timely problem resolution (5.95).

Midrange NAS: Technical Support



NAS NOTE: Techies, not teachers? As a group, the midrange NAS storage system vendors scored their lowest for customer training.

Would you buy this product again?

As we've done on past Quality Awards surveys, we capped off our specific category rating statements with the more general statement, "All things considered, I would buy this product again." As often as not, the results of that final query seem to run counter to our users' responses in the category rating sections. But some things are clear: We know that if users have a uniformly terrible experience with a product or vendor, they're not likely to say they'd repeat the purchase, and we also know that familiarity can be comforting—as a result, so-so category scores might still yield good "buy again" marks.

Against that context, in the enterprise group, 92% of

HPE's users are willing to take the plunge again. That was despite HPE's less than lustrous overall performance. First- and second-place finishers NetApp and EMC also have loyal users with 89% and 86%, respectively, registering buy-again votes—a less-surprising result for sure.

Hewlett Packard Enterprise also led the midrange NAS group with a repeat-purchase score of 95%—somewhat less surprising as HPE came in second overall. EMC (93%) snuck past NetApp (88%) and a Synology-Hitachi tie (86%). ■

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Midrange NAS: Would you buy this product again?

