



✘ IT decision makers are being enticed by new exciting innovations in virtualised storage such as flash, object storage, big data etc. and it may seem very old fashioned to praise the virtues of magnetic tape. Yet, many businesses have a large amount of tapes on and off their main IT sites. In this piece we look at why there is still a long term outlook for what is essentially a spool of storage on plastic film.

The versatility of tape

The reason tape is still attractive is because there are a number of reasons why it offers value. And interestingly some of these reasons are obvious to the service providers and aggregators who are finding new cost models in their cloud based models. The top reasons for tape usage are:

- Mechanically simple
- Occupies the bottom rung of the storage hierarchy
- Enjoys parallel improvements to the storage footprint as does the HDDs
- Cost effective
- Well established media for DR, and as the ultimate backup tier of last resort
- Rugged for off-site transportation
- Choice for infrequent access ie. archiving

This list demonstrates that there are numerous use cases for tape.

Another 60 years?

The tape vendors joined forces recently to coincide with the 60 year anniversary of the IBM 726. If they are seen as the custodians of a dying technology, then there a couple of reasons why that may not be the case. The [LTO consortium](#) have a roadmap for generation 7 and 8 for LTO and generation 6 products will start shipping in 2H12. Add to this the adoption by the LTO consortium and other vendors of the LTFS embedded file system that vastly expands tape usability for customers. There may not be another 60 years for magnetic tape, but the demise, as so often predicted will be protracted.

Super-users

When IT vendors suggested the replacement of tape, inventions such as virtual tape actually served to breathe new life into it. More recently it pays to observe how the super-users architect their solutions. And more importantly how they build in cost efficiency into their business models. The trade-off between access time and desire to access still stands, and compliance regulations have only imposed much longer data retention. With or without a desire for green thinking, the aggregators of cloud based IT make their solution choices with a keen eye on cost. And even a farm of multi-tiered disk arrays comes out as expensive



to acquire and to run. Even long standing users of tape may learn a trick or two from the super-users or choose to employ their services in the cloud such as [DR in the cloud](#).

Picture credit: Spools by [GRBrown1](#)