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Data backup and disaster recovery vendors expect customers to exit the VMware virtualization platform in the coming years over the virtualization titan's switch to a subscription model.

However, a mass exodus from the platform is unlikely due to the entrenchment that companies have in VMware and the complicated nature of a migration, according to industry sources.

The VMware alternatives are expanding. Vendors such as HPE, Veeam and Rubrik have expanded support for open source hypervisors, including Proxmox Virtual Environment (VE), Red Hat OpenShift Virtualization, and Linux Kernel-level Virtual Machines (KVM).

These backup vendors also support private, vendor-made hypervisors such as Microsoft's HyperV, Oracle Linux Virtualization and Nutanix – with the latter two developed from KVM.

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Marketing messaging from these backup vendors balances maintaining a good partnership with VMware and its parent company Broadcom with providing a possible off-ramp for customer workloads now and in the future, said Krista Macomber-Case, an analyst at Futurum Group.

The full-featured VMware ecosystem is almost impossible for any open source alternative to compete with, however. The expected VMware exodus might not come to pass, according to Macomber-Case and other analysts.

Customer could migrate new or smaller workloads out of VMware and experiment in these open source environments before a more comprehensive change down the line, she said. But interviews by the Futurum Group with VMware users indicate most will stay with the lead virtualization platform.

"We're not expecting a mass migration off of VMware," Macomber-Case said. "It's simply too complex and too risky in many circumstances. These [virtualized] applications, just like data, also have gravity."

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Backup options

Backup vendors laid out their customers' new options throughout the past several months during their respective conferences.

Veeam said that it supports Proxmox VE and Oracle Virtualization at its annual VeeamOn conference in June. HPE said its Zerto backup software would now support KVM during HPE Discover in June. Rubrik said it plans to support Proxmox VE and Red Hat OpenShift Virtualization in a blog post in July.

None of the vendors provided specific availability dates for these releases. But all said they would be available later in 2024.

Customer demand is leading the drive to support these alternatives, said Anneka Gupta, chief product officer at Rubrik. Many will stick with VMware, which Rubrik continues fully supporting. But those who want an alternatives will choose based on a shift to the cloud or the need to remain on-premises.

OpenShift Virtualization enables virtual machine workloads in the cloud with the option to integrate or port container workloads, she said.

"Outside of the Broadcom acquisition [of VMware], people are still doing a lift-and-shift [of workloads] into the cloud," Gupta said. "The nice thing about OpenShift is

you can have containers and VMs in one architecture. Customers, regardless of this acquisition, were already moving."

Proxmox is a popular open-source choice among European, Middle Eastern and African customers and those with smaller virtualized environments, she said.

The rollout to support open-source alternatives within Rubrik and other backup vendors software also takes time, she said. Customers expect enterprise maturity with support services as well as ease-of-use niceties such as consoles and API connections, she said.

"When we release these, our customers expect that a certain set of capabilities and features need to be available," she said. "Everything is done in phases, [and] our plan is to launch them with full support."

Migration challenges

Familiarity with the platform and avoiding downtime for retraining might be the deciding factors in sticking with VMware, said Phil Goodwin, an analyst at IDC.

"No organization would be happy if they switched to another virtualization platform and they had a lot of downtime," Goodwin said. "There's going to be a learning curve."

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VMware customers considering other virtualization options for backups might use features to store VM backups within another environment rather than embarking on a full migration, he said. Those considering a complete migration will need to prepare for some technical hurdles or anticipate Broadcom closing some off-ramps to the cloud.

"There will be some that make that journey. But others will stay and they'll pay the difference," Goodwin said.

These [virtualized] applications, just like data, also have gravity.

Analyst, Futurum Group

Krista Macomber-Case

VMware under Broadcom's ownership still offers a mature platform compared to open source or competitor vendors, said Jerome Wendt, president and founder of Data Center Intelligence Group. The company launched an update to VMware Cloud Foundation this month and released VMware Live Recovery this year for disaster and cyber recovery, showing some enterprise capabilities VMware offers.

Those seeking enterprise-level support and capabilities could begin piecing together individual components for a virtualization stack, such as StorMagic's storage

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alternative offering compared to VMware's vSAN, he said. Many customers probably stick with what they know instead of taking on the risk.

"The decision is going to come down to how many vSphere features you are using," Wendt said. "There's no other product that does all that. If you're using [all] that, you're going to have to write a check to VMware."

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