

## DROBO B800I



When Drobo first launched its innovative range of network storage products, it shook the establishment up by offering a unique solution that allows hard disks of different capacities and makes to be used in the same RAID array. Since then, it has vigorously developed its product line and its new B Series of appliances have a sharp focus on businesses.

The B800i on review is an 8-bay IP SAN appliance, offering SMBs (small to medium sized businesses) an easily managed central location for primary and backup storage. It adheres to Drobo's sleek design concepts, while installation is simplified as it uses carrier-less drive bays. You just slip the hard disks straight into the appliance and it automatically adds them to a single virtual storage pool where it configures redundancy at the block level.

This distinctive BeyondRAID technology is central to all Drobo products. For the B800i, you can mix and match SATA drives of different capacities, replace failed drives with no downtime and upgrade capacity with larger drives, as required.

There's much more to BeyondRAID, as it supports single and dual parity, and each

mode can be selected on the fly. Similar to RAID-5, the array starts with single parity, but you can select dual parity whenever you want. As with RAID-6, this incurs more storage overheads. However, you can return the array to single parity at any time which no other RAID controller can do right now.

Another feature that makes the B800i stand out is iSCSI thin provisioning. Normally only found on enterprise level storage arrays, this lets you create high capacity virtual volumes up to 16TB that start small and have blocks dynamically allocated as they are used. For installation, you begin with a direct USB connection and use the Drobo Dashboard utility to assign IP addresses to the pair of gigabit data ports. Once completed, you can remove the USB cable, as all further communication is via the network.

The Dashboard is installed on all hosts and makes light work of virtual volume creation, as you choose a size ranging from 1TB up to 16TB and, if required, activate CHAP authentication. You can restrict access only to the host that created the volume or enable the new multi-host feature, which allows up to eight systems to access the same volume.

Drobo has iSCSI initiator configuration fully

automated, so all you need do for each host is download and install it from Microsoft's support site. Once a volume has been created, you mount it and the Dashboard handles all target assignments.

The Dashboard utility has been completely redesigned for business use and now provides access to all features from a single interface. We found it particularly easy to use, making light work of storage provisioning. It also provides a useful copy function, which runs scheduled backups of local folders and system files on the host to a virtual volume.

The B800i delivered impressive results in our performance tests. We used a dual Opteron 4100 Dell PowerEdge R515, running Windows Server 2008 R2 64-bit, and saw the Iometer utility report a very high raw read throughput of 112MB/sec.

This translated well to our real-world tests. We ran drag and drop copies of a 2.52GB video clip between the server and the appliance to test sustained transfer rates. These operations returned very good average read and write speeds of 99MB/sec and 92MB/sec.

The Drobo B800i is to be recommended to SMBs that want the benefits of IP SANs, but without the hassle. It's extremely easy to deploy and configure, offers good performance and Drobo's BeyondRAID delivers a unique range of storage and RAID array management features.

**Product:** B800i  
**Supplier:** Drobo  
**Tel:** 0845 409 4525  
**Web site:** [www.drobo.co.uk](http://www.drobo.co.uk)  
**Price:** Diskless, £2,739

**VERDICT:** The Drobo B800i is extremely easy to deploy and configure, offers good performance, and Drobo's BeyondRAID delivers a unique range of storage and RAID array management features.