

Acronis Files Connect 10.5 compared to HELIOS Universal File Server UB64

Introduction

Acronis Files Connect (prev. ExtremeZ-IP) runs on Windows servers to provide AFP file sharing and Spotlight search to Mac clients, and file sharing, basic search, and file synchronization to mobile users. The product focus and feature set is very narrow. Its primary purpose is to provide file server compatibility for Mac users in Windows-centric environments. This may be fine for some customers, while others would benefit from a more diverse solution.

The name of HELIOS Universal File Server says it all – a universal file server solution. It runs on all major server platforms, and provides:

- cross-platform file and print server, supporting Windows, Mac, web, iOS, and Android clients;
- cross-platform file synchronization;
- cross-platform Spotlight search system.

Key features of each are compared in Table 1, while Table 2 details Spotlight search capabilities.

Table 1: Key feature comparison		
	HELIOS Universal File Server	Acronis Files Connect
Cross-platform file server		
– Supported server platforms	Windows, Linux, Mac, UNIX	Windows
– Supported client platforms	Windows, Mac, web, mobile	Mac, mobile
– Web portal (private cloud)	Yes	No
– Server application	64-bit	32-bit
Cross-platform Spotlight search		
– File names, text content, metadata	Excellent	Problematic (see Table 2)
Server Administration		
– Remote server admin GUI	Yes (on Mac, Windows, Linux)	Yes (on Windows)
– Manage server users and groups	Yes (Linux, Mac, UNIX)	No
– Remote server monitoring & app	Yes: IT Monitor Server	No
Cross-platform print server		
– Output queue types	10	4
– Hold queues, error queues	Yes	No
– Job “pipelining”	Yes	No
Cross-platform file synchronization		
– Extensive file synchronization options	Yes	No
– Easy GUI sync setup, monitoring	Yes	No
– Server defined synchronization for users & groups (for distributing documents)	Yes	No
Add-ons for design, print, video users		
– HELIOS ImageServer	Highest quality image conversion Workflow automation system	
– HELIOS PrintPreview	Remote soft proofing Remote annotation system	
– HELIOS PDF HandShake	Automatic PDF preflighting Create PDF server	
Pricing: 10 users		
	HELIOS Universal File Server (with Virtual Server Appliance)	Acronis Files Connect
	2950 €, includes OS and VM	1195 € + Windows + CALs

Table 2: Server file search systems			
Feature	HELIOS Universal File Server	Acronis Files Connect [1]	
	HELIOS Spotlight compatible indexing and search system	Acronis via Windows Search [2]	Acronis Content Indexer
Cross-platform Spotlight search			
– Supported clients	Windows, Mac, web, mobile, CLI	Mac	Mac
Filename			
– Find files via name:filename	100% hit rate	Some misses [3]	Not reliable [4]
– Unicode filename searches	Yes	Yes	No [4]
– Filenames in ZIP archives	Yes	No	No
Text content			
– Find files via text content	Yes	Limited [5]	Yes
– Unicode text content searches	Good (90% of test files found)	Poor (28%)	Good (80%)
Metadata			
– Metadata attribute:value indexing and searches (e.g. author:Chris)	extensive	minimal [6][7]	minimal [6][7]
– Compound Spotlight searches (e.g. name:testname kind:folder)	Yes	Yes	Yes
– Metadata indexing of image files	Yes: XMP, IPTC, EXIF, resolution	No	No
– PDF form field and XMP attributes indexed	13	1	3
InDesign			
InDesign – metadata	Yes (EXIF, IPTC and XMP)	No	No
InDesign & XPress full text	Yes (ImageServer option, xpv files)	No	No
InDesign & XPress metadata	Yes (ImageServer option, xpv files)	No	No
Mobile app; find server files via:			
– Filename search	Yes	Yes	Yes
– Text content searches	Yes	Yes	No
– Metadata attribute searches	Yes	No	No

Notes:

[1] An Acronis volume can use one indexing system or the other, not both

[2] The Windows Search service may experience problems with more than a couple million files

[3] Fails to find some files when the search term is a partial file name

[4] Problems with partial filenames, filenames with spaces, and filenames with extended characters (e.g. ü, ö, ñ, ç, ø, etc.)

[5] Only indexes first 1.5 MB of each file

[6] Document metadata for many file types is not indexed

[7] For those file types that are indexed, only a few attributes are indexed

Evaluation

Two main points can be surmised from Tables 1 and 2. One, the feature set of HELIOS Universal File Server is much more extensive than that of Acronis Files Connect. And two, the quality of the HELIOS features far exceeds that of the comparable Acronis features. Let's look at two major services: the respective print servers, and Spotlight search systems.

The Acronis print server is rudimentary, with minimal output types, and job management options. The HELIOS Advanced Printing System is designed for commercial printers and publishers, for use in demanding mission-critical environments to provide extensive output, job management, and logging options.

The Acronis Spotlight search implementation has many problems. Searching by partial filenames misses many files. Finding files with Unicode names or text content is poorly supported. And only a few document metadata attributes are indexed or searchable as attribute:value pairs (e.g. author:Chris), missing out on the power of Spotlight attribute searches.

On the other hand, the HELIOS cross-platform Spotlight indexing and search system achieves 100% accuracy in finding files when searching by name:filename. HELIOS has excellent support for Unicode file names and content. And HELIOS indexes an extensive range of document metadata, such as MS Office document Properties, PDF properties, form fields, and XMP attributes, very extensive image metadata (e.g. EXIF, IPTC and XMP), etc. With HELIOS ImageServer, even InDesign document text and metadata get indexed.

Overall, HELIOS offers a powerful reliable Spotlight search system, whereas the Acronis search is much less versatile and reliable.

Performance, reliability, and scalability?

HELIOS Universal File server is known as a powerful server solution, and is often deployed in high volume time-critical environments, such as printing plants, or ad agencies. HELIOS network file transfer performance is close to wire speed, and scales linearly until the maximum server/network bandwidth capacity is achieved.

Having no production experience with Acronis Files Connect, we can only go by posts in various user forums, or inquiries sent to HELIOS. While there are many users who post that they are quite happy with the Acronis solution, there are others who are not quite so sanguine.

Some Acronis users report that it is too slow and has poor Mac client Spotlight search support. Others that Acronis Access Connect failed in their deployment; that its performance degraded quickly and required daily reboots. Another mentions “we tested Acronis Access Connect quite a bit, we even spent money on it... it worked okay in our development environment, however it failed in production.”

While such posts are not conclusive, they might indicate inherent Acronis performance limits. Stress testing will be an important part of due diligence prior to purchase.

Price comparison: apples to oranges

Acronis Files Connect is a niche product connecting Mac users to Windows servers. HELIOS Universal File Server is a complete cross-platform turnkey file server solution. Its broader scope of services, high performance, quality, and reliability naturally merit a higher price. Note that the two products do use different licensing models, so HELIOS might require fewer user licenses.

HELIOS licensing is very flexible, counting just the number of users per day. So if you have e.g. 45 users, but no more than 30 users ever access the server on any given day, then licensing 30 users would suffice. In addition, HELIOS universal user licenses can be used for server access by Mac, Windows, web, and mobile users.

Also note that a Windows Client Access License (CAL) is required for every Acronis Files Connect user accessing the Windows server.

Conclusion

Prospective users must weigh the value of the extra quality, reliability, and versatility that HELIOS Universal File Server delivers. Not to mention the much greater feature set. We feel that careful evaluation of these attributes will make a strong case for selecting HELIOS Universal File Server.

Version: 1.0

We strived for accuracy in this report. Please communicate any corrections to HELIOS Software (mktg@helios.de)