Database Hardware Selection Guidelines

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Database servers have hardware requirements different from other infrastructure software, specifically unique demands on I/O and memory. This presentation covers these differences and various I/O options and their benefits.

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Outline

- CPU
- Multi-threading
- GHz
- Pipelining
- SMP
- NUMA
Nope!

- CPU
- Multi-threading
- GHz
- Pipelining
- SMP
- NUMA
Normal Server Priorities

- CPU
- Memory
- I/O
Database Server Priorities

- I/O
- Memory
- CPU
Why the Difference?

Traditional servers are often **CPU** constrained because of:

- Network overhead (http)
- Text processing (email)
- Virtual machines (application servers)
- Application code
Database Server’s Unique Requirements

- Sequential scans of large tables
- Index scans causing random I/O
- Unpredictable query requirements
- Reporting

These do not require major CPU resources.
Durability Adds Even More I/O Requirements

ACID (D = durability) requires committed transactions to be stored permanently. Few other server facilities must honor this requirement.
Magnetic Disk I/O Stack

- PostgreSQL Shared Buffer Cache
- Kernel Disk Buffer Cache
- HBA/RAID Cache
- Disk Cache
- Magnetic Disk

- fsync
- write-back
- write-through
Magnetic Disk I/O Stack With BBU

PostgreSQL Shared Buffer Cache

Kernel Disk Buffer Cache

HBA/RAID Cache

Disk Cache

Magnetic Disk

Write-Ahead Log

fsync

write-back
Flash (NAND) Storage I/O Stack

- PostgreSQL Shared Buffer Cache
- Write-Ahead Log
  - fsync
- Kernel Disk Buffer Cache
  - fsync
- HBA/RAID Cache
  - write-back
- Disk Staging Cache
- Flash (NAND) Solid State Disk (SSD)
DRAM Storage I/O Stack

PostgreSQL Shared Buffer Cache

Kernel Disk Buffer Cache

HBA/RAID Cache

DRAM Solid State Disk (SSD)

Write-Ahead Log

fsync

fsync

?
Write-Back vs. Write-Through Caching

- Write-back caching returns write success before passing data to lower storage layers
- Write-through caching waits for write acknowledgement from lower storage layers before returning success
Caching Layers

- HBA/RAID cache behavior is usually controlled by the HBA/RAID firmware, often conditionally based on the health of the BBU
- Storage drive cache behavior can be set by utility commands or by using certain operating system calls
- Enterprise/SAS storage devices usually default to write-through, while consumer/SATA devices usually default to write-back
HBA/RAID Caching

- HBA/RAID controllers often set storage drive caching mode to write-through
- With an HBA/RAID non-volatile cache, there is little advantage to using write-back mode on storage drives
Durable Cache: Battery and Supercapacitor-Backed Units

- Verify battery or supercapacitor (supercap) existence visually
- Most write the cache to local flash memory on power failure
- Battery-backed units (BBU)
  - Detected battery failure can disable write-back cache mode
  - Requires failure monitoring and replacement
- Look for a feature called “power loss protection”
Battery-Backed Unit on RAID Controller

https://www.flickr.com/photos/jemimus/
Supercapacitor-Backed Unit on SSD

Also called “power loss protection”

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Embedded_World_2014_SSD.jpg
Magnetic Disk Selection

- More small spindles is better than fewer large spindles
- RAID 5/6 is too slow for database writes
- RAID 10 is popular
- Make sure SMART reporting is fully supported
- SAS/SCSI disks are usually designed for enterprise workloads, unlike SATA/ATA
  - reliability
  - error reporting
  - 24-hour operation
  - heat
  - vibration
SSD Selection

- Flash (NAND) vs. DRAM: [https://appuals.com/ssd-buying-guide/](https://appuals.com/ssd-buying-guide/)

- Write staging area — it is not just cache
- Running a flash (NAND) SSD in write-through mode can reduce its usable life because of increased write cycles
Configuring Postgres for SSDs

- Best for WAL and random I/O, e.g., indexes
- Set `random_page_cost = 1.1`
- Set `effective_io_concurrency` to 256 for SATA, 1,000 for NVMe
Filesystem Options

- xfs or ext4 over ext3
- Reduce file system logging, particularly for pg_wal/ directory
- Disable access (atime) recording
Shared Storage

- SAN and NAS replace direct-attached storage (DAS) with shared storage
- Often used for easier storage management
- Shared I/O resource
- Databases often wait for I/O completion, meaning they have to contend with shared resource contention
- SAN serves block devices, NAS serves file systems
The more RAM, the better; this reduces I/O requirements
Ideally, five minutes of your working set
The more RAM, the more possibility of RAM failure
Use ECC (Error Correction Codes) RAM
  - detect errors
  - correct errors
  - report faulty memory
  - cosmic radiation
CPUs

- Parallel query allows a single session to use multiple CPUs
- Heavy use of server-side functions might generate significant CPU load
- CPUs can become a bottleneck if the entire database fits in RAM and the workload is read-only
Not the Same

Just because something has the same interface doesn’t mean has the same capabilities. Compatible computer hardware is not all the same.

https://www.flickr.com/photos/cdevers/