Instant Insight

EMC Introduces Open Storage Management Products/Technologies

By Charles King

EMC has introduced four new open storage management products and technologies that the company said delivered on the Automated Information Storage (AutoIS) initiative EMC announced in August 2001. WideSky, a middleware product that is part of EMC's ongoing application programming interface (API) program, allows storage management applications to run on products from multiple vendors in increasingly prevalent heterogeneous enterprise environments. EMC Control Center (ECC) Open Edition is a single console that utilizes an Oracle database to centrally view and manage all the platforms, devices and resources across multi-vendor storage environments. ECC Replication Manager is a software solution for automating data replication and backup processes across devices from multiple vendors. ECC StorageScope is an automated reporting tool that allows users to create single views and reports of all of the devices included in heterogeneous data storage environments.

As part of the introduction of WideSky, EMC announced support for storage systems including EMC's Symmetrix, CLARiiON, Celerra and Dell/EMC FC products, Compaq, HDS, HP, Sun, IBM and Network Appliance and switches including EMC Connectrix, Brocade, McData and Qlogic. WideSky also supports most proprietary UNIX and mainframe hosts, Windows 2000 and NT, Linux, FreeBSD and Novell NetWare, and databases including Oracle, Informix, IBM DB2 and Microsoft SQL Server 2000 and SQL Server 7. WideSky and ECC Replication Manager are available immediately. ECC StorageScope will be available in thirty days, and ECC OpenEdition will be available in ninety days.

This series of announcements may seem a bit confusing on first view, but becomes less dense when one better understands the context. Over the past few years, enterprise storage purchasers have decidedly moved away from deploying homogeneous data storage environments with hardware and devices purchased from single vendors and their preferred partners. Instead, due in part to business acquisitions/consolidations and also as a reflection of changing value propositions driven by decreasing hardware and telecommunications costs, businesses are electing to support storage devices wherever they choose, telling their IT staff to make the stuff work. The result has been increasingly complex, increasingly dispersed enterprise data storage environments. Managing such environments, where business critical storage processes such as data replication and backup must be performed across scores of devices from multiple vendors, is increasingly difficult. Additionally, as the shortage of qualified IT staff continues, the situation has deteriorated markedly.

While any number of storage vendors have identified the need for unified heterogeneous data storage management, and expressed a willingness to deliver simplified solutions, their efforts to date have largely been relegated to supporting products from limited numbers of preferred partners. What are the necessary elements for delivering these solutions? First, while offering such products may contradict traditional, vendor-centric sales behavior, in embracing unified storage management solutions vendors are simply going where their customers have already gone. In our view, those vendors that develop

heterogeneous storage management solutions have more to gain than they do to lose. Second, the ongoing shortage of qualified IT staff requires that these new solutions be highly automated and intuitive, especially as regards common or business-critical storage management processes. Finally, making such solutions work in the marketplace will require the commitment of a major vendor whose products are utilized across a wide variety of vendors and industries.

How do EMC's AutoIS initiative and OpenEdition products fit into this scenario? To our way of thinking, the announcements suggest that EMC appears to recognize the benefits of embracing heterogeneous storage management, and has taken the steps necessary to deliver solutions that will impact both the company's and its competitors' storage clients. EMC WideSky, in particular, seems geared to providing a practical means of making heterogeneous storage management solutions a reality. Along with the obvious benefits such solutions provide storage customers, open API programs offer ISVs opportunities to develop new value-added solution sets instead of simply duplicating their efforts with each version their products supporting different platforms. Additionally, the features incorporated in ECC OpenEdition, Replication Manager and StorageScope all appear to deliver the kinds of centralized, automated management solutions that should be valuable to enterprises with heterogeneous storage environments. Finally, EMC position among enterprise storage vendors should ensure that the company's AutoIS initiative and related products will carry significant impact.

Does that mean that EMC's new products will be a slam-dunk success? Hardly. First, it is unlikely that other storage hardware vendors, who have been delivering their own management solutions sets at a furious rate, will simply roll over like friendly puppies and acquiesce to EMC as the sector's alpha dog. The same can be said for storage ISV's, who have been laboring hard to create unified management solutions, and reap the profits such products are likely to provide. While we expect the ongoing fight for storage dominance will continue to be tough and bloody over the near and long terms, if EMC actually delivers the open API-based benefits that WideSky suggests, they could develop a number of crucial alliances among friendly storage ISVs. What will finally turn the tide of this battle will be storage customers themselves. If they regard EMC's announcements as a simple example of storage vendor self-delusion, the initiatives will likely fail. If clients come to believe in the promises offered by EMC, the company's WideSky and Open Edition products could become a new de facto standard for data storage management.