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HP Expands Adaptive Enterprise Portfolio

By Jim Balderston

HP announced this week it has purchased San Francisco-based Talking Blocks, a three-year-old company that makes software for managing and monitoring Web Services. HP officials indicated that the acquisition of Talking Blocks would extend its existing Open View offerings, and would allow enterprises to have a single management console for a range of point management products from a variety of vendors. Talking Blocks software manages security, manages performance, provides logging and auditing capabilities, and provides visibility into the Web Services IT environment. HP said it had begun developing similar capabilities inhouse, and had several customers running the results of the HP effort, before it decided to buy Talking Blocks. As a result, the company stated it would be able to bring this element of Web Services to market much more quickly. No purchase price was announced.

In some ways, HP may have been forced into this purchase. With an inhouse development effort looking to take some — and apparently an unacceptably long — time, it decided to move quickly to offer this key functionality in its ongoing Adaptive Enterprise push. We also suspect that the purchase of other players in this space, such as former HP partners Think Dynamics and Terraspring, may have driven HP to move quickly. Think Dynamics was recently bought by IBM; Terraspring was acquired earlier this year by Sun.

While there may be an initial appearance of HP playing catch-up, we would argue that the quick pace the company chose to pursue — reflected in its buy-not-build decision — indicates HP has gotten real religion on Web Services and what it calls the "Adaptive Enterprise." Considering the ongoing market cultivation to drive such offerings in the marketplace, making this move now — albeit later than some competitors — means that HP will have a horse in the race, as Web Services become a much larger share of the enterprise IT world. By recognizing the importance of providing the means for IT departments to minimize the complexity of managing Web Services environments, HP clearly grasps the reality of selling such offerings going forward: offering more flexible services-based IT deployments means greater complexity, and management of the complexity has to be kept under control. We would also argue that while Web Services and their complexity are today mostly an issue in larger enterprises, we believe the allure of Web Services for middle tier companies will grow as these companies increasingly look for alternatives to their existing IT deployments. For HP, and any other vendor in this space, we believe that the ability to bring functionality like that offered by Talking Blocks down market to the top end of the SMB space will provide a lucrative revenue stream going forward.

IBM POWERs Moving Images Collection

By Charles King

IBM has announced that the company's Linux on POWER (pSeries) technologies have been chosen by three universities to build the Library of Congress's first centralized online catalog of film, television, and digital images from libraries, national archives, museums, and broadcasting companies. The centralized online catalog will ultimately become the world's largest repository of digital moving images, and will greatly expand the Library of Congress's ability to provide video images via a single Internet-accessible resource. The University of Washington, Rutgers, and the Georgia Institute of Technology have received a $900,000 National Science Foundation grant for the project. In 2004, the Library of Congress will be the host site for the Moving Images Collection (MIC) after its development. The MIC databases and Web portal will be powered by two IBM eServer p610 and two p630 server running SuSE Linux Enterprise SLES 8 and leveraging IBM Directory Server. The p610 and p630 systems will act

as the gateway to the databases, and permit users to search and locate moving images. Users can then arrange with the content providers to view or reference material after finding images with the MIC.

Observed literally, IBM's involvement in the MIC counts as pretty small potatoes; the sale of four lower end pSeries boxes to drive a database and Web portal. But there are a couple of unique aspects to this deal that are worth further commentary. The first of those, of course, is the Library of Congress. Despite other obvious and subtle shortcomings, the collection and archiving of cultural data and artifacts is something the Federal government does pretty darn well. Further, being chosen for any Library of Congress project, let alone one with the historical and media underpinnings of the MIC, offers IT vendors a unique association that is tough to find and virtually impossible to buy. For this reason, the deal should provide IBM levels of good will and prestige that far outweigh the cost or value of the hardware and software involved.

More important, though, was the decision of the MIC developer teams at the U of W, Rutgers, and Georgia Tech to deploy Linux on those pSeries boxes. The affinity for Linux in many university settings may have made this a natural choice, but some other factors aided in the decision. According to news reports, the project developers chose Linux for the MIC due to its inherent scalability and cost-effectiveness compared to proprietary offerings. More importantly, one project spokesperson said that Linux on Intel solutions exhibited difficulties with device drivers, a problem that pSeries' "consistency of hardware" features were expected to solve. While IA-32-based solutions may represent the lion's share of today's Linux server market, the constant evolution of these products, which can vary radically from vendor to vendor, offers some interesting challenges for organizations considering Linux deployments. If long-term stability, scalability, and performance outweigh short-term savings, it is interesting to know that qualifying Linux solutions exist well beyond the Industry Standard platform.

HP Extends Grid for Adaptive Enterprise

By Charles King

HP has announced plans to further enable its enterprise infrastructure technologies for grid computing by integrating industry grid standards including the Globus Toolkit and Open Grid Services Architecture (OGSA) across the company's enterprise product lines. HP also announced enterprise consulting within HP Services for grid-based platforms that will provide management, deployment, and lifecycle support of grid architectures. According to HP, the company's grid product and service plans will extend the company's Adaptive Enterprise strategy to synchronize business and IT. At this point, HP offers a number of grid-enabled services, solutions, and products including Grid Software Infrastructure based on OpenView, Grid Resource Topology Designer, the Web Services Management Framework (WSMF), and SmartFrog.

While grid was a topic everyone seemed to be talking about last year, grid news since then has quieted a bit. This is not surprising, since the initial excitement around virtually any IT strategic announcement tends to be followed by the quiet, less public effort required to actually make things work. Considering the sheer complexity of grid, this is particularly understandable. In general, grid solutions allow all of the grid-enabled computing assets in a networked IT environment, from desktops to servers to storage, to be allocated and managed as a single entity. From a practical standpoint, Open Systems grid technologies enable computing jobs and workloads to be parceled out to whichever IT assets are most appropriate or readily available, providing a means for entire IT infrastructures to be more flexible, scalable, stable, and responsive than conventional standalone solutions.

So what does HP's grid announcement mean in the context of its greater Adaptive Enterprise strategy? First, it should be noted that HP has been active in grid research, but the company has not been quite as vocal in pursuing grid as a commercial product strategy as have some other vendors, Grid was a part of the company's Utility Data Center (UDC), but that initiative has found more interest among established HP customers than the greater market. However, HP's Adaptive Enterprise initiative announced in May of this year provided the company a brand new umbrella that offers to shade a host of related initiatives. The fact is that while Adaptive Enterprise (or other similar efforts such as IBM's On Demand and Sun's SunONE) offers to provide enterprise customers a seamless, fully integrated computing experience, grid technologies will provide much of the heavy lifting necessary to make that experience real. By way of this official announcement, HP is basically saying that they get it; "it" being both the central role grid will play in driving and supporting the company's future products and strategies, and the fact that the Globus Toolkit and OGSA are the best means of developing and delivering those offerings. Overall, we see HP's announcement as particularly good news for the company and its customers, as well as for grid proponents in general.

Fighting IT Colonialism

By Jim Balderston

News reports out of Asia indicate that Japan, South Korea, and China are considering teaming up to develop a new operating system as an alternative to Microsoft Windows. According to news reports, Japanese trade and industry minister Takeo Hiranuma will propose the idea formally to his peers at the ASEAN meeting being held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia this week. The proposal follows on the heels of a meeting in March between more than a hundred software engineers from the three countries, including members of the business community. According to the news reports, the proposal would advocate the creation of a Linux-based alternative to Windows offerings, including a substitute for Microsoft Office.

In many ways, the effort of these three Asian economies should come as little surprise. European nations have already made it clear that they will pursue options other than a U.S.-centric IT path, which in many cases is largely represented by the likes of Microsoft. They too are leaning more on open source options like Linux. These counties have expressed concern that they not be beholden to companies that are dominant U.S. vendors without maintaining some control over their future IT evolution. Perhaps reflecting on their own histories, many countries seek to avoid what we would term "IT colonialism."

In the case of South Korea, Japan, and China, the idea that billions of dollars might leave the region's economy to pay for IT products may seem a bit much to bear, given the precarious state of some of the region's national economies and their rather alarming boom and bust cycles. While keeping IT investment dollars — or Yuan — inside the Asian community, they perhaps hope to smooth some of the bumps and bruises of their economic future. One can't help but note that in many ways, offering a home-grown alternative to Western IT software and applications serves as a very effective trade barrier to companies — such as Microsoft — which hope to do a sizable amount of business (despite copious copying and other intellectual property theft) in the world's most populous region. We believe that seeing the proposal in this light may be the most instructive way to view it, as it demonstrates clearly to Western IT vendors that entering the Asian market — and the European one for that matter — will have to be done in ways that recognize the sentiments that have moved these three Asian countries to consider this alternative to Western IT products. Making further inroads into these markets will require more patient, collaborative, and sensitive sales approaches as a result. In other words, IT nation building will have to be a broad-based, collaborative effort where every stake-holder participates. This speaks volumes on the Internet's ability to bring the world closer together. It should not be surprising that it also brings competitors and competition closer to the western shores of North America.