

IBM Announces Opteron-Based Workstation A Tale of Two Companies Let Your Google Do the Walking



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By Charles King

IBM has announced the IntelliStation Pro A workstation, a new dual-processor capable solution that combines advanced workstation features with AMD's Opteron processor architecture. Like all Opteron-based solutions, the IntelliStation Pro A supports both 32- and 64-bit operating environments and applications. In addition, the IntelliStation offers expanded graphics capabilities via 2D to extreme 3D graphics cards from NVIDIA to drive high-end visualization applications. According to IBM, the A Pro is a particularly appropriate solution for industries that run graphics and floating point-intensive applications such as computer aided design (CAD), computer aided engineering (CAE), petroleum exploration and production, drug discovery, digital content creation, and financial analysis. In addition, the Opteron's native 32-/64-bit capabilities makes the A Pro an option for end users and ISVs that wish to migrate to higher performance 64-bit solutions. The A Pro joins IBM's IntelliStation family of workstations: the IntelliStation M Pro (Intel Pentium 4-based), the Z Pro (Intel Xeon processor) and the IntelliStation POWER 275 (IBM POWER-processor-based). IBM will offer the A Pro preloaded with Red Hat Enterprise Workstation 3.0 for 32 and 64 bits (1). The A Pro will also run SUSE LINUX at 32 and 64 bits as well as Microsoft Windows XP Professional 32-bit with planned support for 64-bit performance, when available from Microsoft. The IntelliStation A Pro will be available in May 2004, with pricing starting at \$2,619.

When it was first introduced to the market just over a year ago, the fate of AMD's Opteron processor was cloudy, at best. The Opteron's elegant 32-/64-bit capabilities contradicted much of the conventional and vendor wisdom regarding the paths end users take toward 64-bit computing. Additionally, the reigning king of the 32-bit server world, Intel, denigrated AMD's approach, positing its own Itanium architecture as a more appropriate and robust solution for 32-bit customers who wanted to make the 64-bit jump. The Opteron got a boost when IBM became the first major vendor to support the platform, but that was no guarantee of success. However, the road to the marketplace includes a host of unpredictable, often curious twists and turns. Over the past year, Opteron-based solutions became customer darlings, and AMD was deluged in media ink. More importantly, vendors including Fujitsu, Sun, and HP declared Opteron support, and in a dramatic turnaround, Intel announced plans to deliver Opteron-like 64-bit extensions technologies for its venerable Xeon processors. In other words, Opteron arrived after blowing a few doors open and down.

Given this, what is one to make of IBM's new workstation? A couple of things. First, the IntelliStation Pro A offers all the usual bells and whistles workstation customers expect; a robust platform, high-end graphics capabilities, and flexible expansion capabilities. As a result, it should meet the needs of IBM's target markets and put pressure on U.S. vendors (i.e., Sun and HP) who don't yet offer Opteron-based workstations. More critically, though, the IntelliStation Pro A allows IBM to flesh out its Opteron strategy with a product that complements its existing server solutions. While workstations are instrumental in CAE and CAD applications, end-stage rendering is performed in server farms or clusters. With the IntelliStation Pro A, IBM has the pieces in place to offer integrated, end-to-end Opteron-based graphics solutions. Equally important, though, is the part Linux can play in this arena. Given IBM's Linux focus, it can rightfully promote a Linux-enabled IntelliStation Pro A as a powerful migratory platform from competitors' UNIX-based workstations. Additionally, Opteron's native capabilities, combined with SuSE and Red hat's OS solutions, make it a logical platform for ISVs who are ready to drive 64-bit

Linux solutions. Overall, we see IBM's IntelliStation Pro A as the sort of logical building block required to make a new market.

A Tale of Two Companies

By Jim Balderston

IBM has unveiled a new set of co-marketing incentives and partners in its ongoing efforts to drive Linux toward the mid-tier enterprise market. The company said it is increasing its incentives for Leaders for Linux, a subset of its business partner community, whose numbers the company said have grown from 75 last year to more than 200 today. The new incentive levels add funds for co-marketing efforts if the partner builds a solution on Linux for the POWER chip, and will double incentives from \$5,000 to \$10,000 if the Linux/POWER solution was developed through IBM's Value Networks, a community of ISVs SIs and business partners. The company also said that business partner migrations from Windows NT to Linux are accelerating, with more than forty-five such migrations now in place, up from twenty a year ago. Meanwhile, Novell provided a peak at features in the SuSE Linux 9.1 offering the company is planning on releasing in May. Two versions will be released: Personal and Professional. Among the new features included in the new release is the ability to run the Personal edition of the new release off of what the company calls a "Live CD," which will allow a user to run the OS without installing it on their machines. A second disk will allow for an installation.

Despite SCO's (and, apparently Microsoft's) best effort to curb enthusiasm for Linux, significant momentum for the OS is solidifying within the marketplace. SuSE 9.1 offers a number of end-user-specific features, including the GNOME desktop and a host of baseline applications like a browser, email, graphics, audio and video, as well as spreadsheets and an HTML editor; the kinds of applications that could convince a number of desktop users to eject the Live CD and install the thing. Slowly, but surely, Linux is creating a presence on the desktop. At the same time, IBM continues to tout Linux as a key element in its ongoing efforts to make inroads into the SMB market as well as offering viable Linux-based alternatives to the large enterprise environment.

In our minds, there is a striking juxtaposition in these two announcements, and in the companies making them. In Novell's case, we see a company that was quickly becoming an afterthought now attempting to remake itself with the acquisition of SuSE and the subsequent release of the latest edition of SuSE's offerings. It appears to us that Novell is hoping to ride Linux back into relevancy. At the same time, IBM — never irrelevant except in the fantasies of some early Internet propagandists — is using the Linux/POWER platform to drive its efforts to capture more of the hotly contested SMB market while chipping away at Microsoft's installed server base and ISV community. Furthermore, IBM's Linux on POWER combination bolsters the idea that POWER is an industry standard for 64-bit computing, something that may take the folks at Intel and HP a bit of getting used to. In short, we see two companies of vastly different statures riding Linux as a means to relevance and profitability in a market that just a few years ago would have scoffed at the very idea of such a thing. Need we say more?

Let Your Google Do the Walking

By Charles King

Google has announced the beta version of Google Local, which integrates local search results including relevant local information with neighborhood business listings, maps, directions, and useful web pages into Google.com. According to Google, the new capabilities illustrate the company's commitment to developing products that make it faster and easier for people to search across diverse sources of information from a single search box. Google Local search functionality is integrated so that relevant local information for specific keywords or locations is automatically presented to users at the top of search results pages. When these results are available, they are marked by a small compass icon which, when clicked, connects users to a Google Local search results page. Google Local combines comprehensive local business, map, and service information drawn from a wide variety of U.S. databases such as the yellow pages and other sources. Google Local currently connects users to U.S.-based local information, but the company plans to include local information for international markets in the coming months.

One continuing exercise in the ongoing march of IT into day-to-day life is the attempt to make something old appear, or preferably act, brand spanking new. Google Local is a case in point. At one level, Google is simply trying to leverage its well known single-box search technology as a means to research and find local businesses and activities via a virtual yellow pages model, but local search is hardly new. Yahoo has offered local/city guides for years, as have a number of more specialized travel and entertainment Web sites. Google Local is more similar to these services than unique, with a couple of differences. The Google Local interface is a bit simpler and easier to navigate than many local search engines. In addition, Google Local's integrated map features offer a couple of bells and whistles others do not. For example, searching for pizza in a given town offers not only directions for specific restaurants but a single map that pinpoints all local pizza parlors.

Features aside, the real leverage of Google Local may be in its parent's notable ability to generate advertising revenues, a skill Yahoo and others have never been particularly adept at. Ironically, Google made its original market splash by offering quick search results unsullied by advertising. While the company took some heat when it finally began selling ad space, it cooled things down by identifying and separately listing paid-for links. Google Local takes this strategy forward an incrementally critical step. By providing locally-focused services, Google can continue building its formidable brand while increasing by orders of magnitude its advertising opportunities with local businesses. The company's success in pursuing this top-down migration into the public consciousness provides an interesting model for blending online savvy with old fashioned business practices. At the end of the day, cool technology and catchy advertising is no match for delivering services your customers first remember, then, decide they can't live without. At a time when Google is girding itself for a full frontal assault from Microsoft and any number of geeky search technology start-ups, the company's hybrid approach to building its brand and business via new services such as Google Local is likely to be the key to its survival.