Market Roundup

IBM Helps App Developers Find True Grid
HP Introduces Solutions for Managing Demand-Driven Computing
Balancing Act on a Wire(less)
Finns Award Berners-Lee IT "Survivor" Prize

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IBM Helps App Developers Find True Grid

By Charles King

IBM has announced that seven application developers including Abaqus, Actuate, Citrix, Cognos, Engineous, Fluent, and Sequas recently completed work with IBM to ready their solutions for grid computing. The developers' efforts were completed with the help of IBM's Solutions Grid for Business Partners, an initiative which aims to extend software solutions to grid environments by providing assistance through IBM Innovation Centers at locations including Hursley in the UK; Waltham, MA; Chicago, IL; and San Mateo, CA. IBM has active grid projects with enterprises such as Charles Schwab, Hewitt Associates, and Browne and Company, and also utilizes grid solutions in its own Benchmark Centers, which help customers effectively test pre-production application performance.

Histories of settlement efforts in territories like those that eventually became Florida and the Western United States suggest that such areas grow in large part due to the efforts of developers and speculators. However, the essential aims and long-term impacts of these two groups are often quite different. Speculators tend to focus on profit as a primary or even singular motive, and express little if any concern for the long-term prospects of the people or places involved in their schemes. Developers follow nearly diametrically opposite paths that emphasize the elements needed to build self-directed, sustainable communities. To survive, early communities required necessary infrastructures, as well as residents and the shopkeepers, service workers, and skilled crafts- and tradespeople required to support them. The goal of these like-minded individuals and groups of was to encourage the evolution of rough outposts into busy towns and, eventually, successful, influential cities. However, to entice participants into sharing the inherent work and risks involved, they had to believe that goal was achievable.

So what, if anything, do IBM's Solutions Grid for Business Partners and its efforts among application developers have to do with speculators selling Florida swampland for vacation homes and the growth of towns and cities during the California Gold Rush? Though their activities are somewhat different in IT realms, analogous speculator and developer behaviors can be found across the industry, with some vendors and investors hoping to pursue largely speculative roads to success while others focus on building sustaining communities of companies and individuals who work together to enjoy common success. While pioneering grid developers focused on the esoteric scientific and technical areas where grid succeeded initially, IBM's latest developer list offers a host of enterprise name brands focused on a range of business-critical processes. Equally importantly, commercial vendors tend to pursue those opportunities that offer the best balance of risk and reward. In other words, they are not likely to waste their energies and investments in places they believe will end up becoming the IT equivalents of ghost towns. Overall, we see the involvement of these enterprise developers with IBM as evidence that the company's grid effort is beginning to take hold in tangible ways, and will aid the evolution of grid from an esoteric technological outpost toward becoming a thriving, commercial IT entity.

HP Introduces Solutions for Managing Demand-Driven Computing

By Rob Kidd

HP has announced new management solutions based on HP OpenView that the company indicated would offer a control point for managing the Adaptive Enterprise. The solutions enable business-level insight across IT operations through dynamic linking of business and IT for realtime management of the business, IT service applications, and infrastructure delivery. HP OpenView Business Process Insight allows the monitoring of business process health and the expression of the impact of IT in business terms by mapping enterprise-critical business processes to their IT resources. The HP OpenView Route Analytics Management System allows network behavior to be understood in real time, for the identification and correction of failures, and for performance monitoring and management. According to HP, the new offerings are designed to automatically identify critical application components, such as operating systems, middleware, and databases, and to provide assessments of availability, bottlenecks, and application performance. Hardware assets including networks, workstations, servers, printers, and storage components are automatically discovered and graphically depicted, and can be centrally allocated and maintained. The new solutions are coupled with new HP PartnerONE services, which are designed to help HP partners build enhanced management capabilities into their products and solutions by either integrating with, or embedding them within HP OpenView.

The trend toward demand-driven computing models such as HP's Adaptive Enterprise is a key driver underlying these HP offerings. In order to help organizations comply with increasing numbers of regulatory requirements and competitive pressures, IT is becoming increasingly demand-driven, operating proactively to closely mirror the business it serves. In this evolving environment, competitive and market pressures require that enterprises quickly leverage the business processes and information of customers, suppliers, and markets, as well as exploit to the fullest the value of their own information assets and lifecycles. Highly automated, streamlined, and simplified IT operations closely aligned to business processes are fundamental to achieving these results. At the end of the day, HP's OpenView-based business management solutions and partner service offerings are an acknowledgement of the changing reality of business and IT, and their mutual need for close alignment.

However, this dynamic link between business change and IT infrastructure can only be achieved with the automation and insight provided by integrated business and IT services management software, and HP intends for its OpenView software and solutions to fill this role. Throughout its history, the OpenView management suite has achieved a significant presence among HP customers, but has not always lived up to its billing. How well datacenter realities map against HP's vision in this new OpenView solutions cycle will depend on several factors. The implementation quality of deployments, enterprises' adoption of appropriate service-oriented architectures to adequately support service management, adherence to best practices, the degree to which IT embraces of the "service delivery" model, and adoption and support of partners for the PartnerONE program are but a few of the issues likely to arise as this new cycle proceeds. How well HP and its customers will respond to these challenges remains to be seen, but these latest offerings suggest that the company is pressing ahead aggressively and systematically with its OpenView vision.

Balancing Act on a Wire(less)

By Jim Balderston

A number of antivirus companies received copies this week of what they call a proof-of-concept worm that infects smart phones using the Symbian operating system. The worm, called Cabir, was received first by the Russian antivirus firm Kaspersky Labs, and was also sent to other antivirus firms. Cabir is capable of spreading itself to phones by scanning for other phones using Bluetooth wireless technology, then sending itself to the next phone. The virus does not appear to have a malicious payload, antivirus companies noted, and there have been no detections of the worm found in the wild. In an unrelated announcement, Maxtor and Linksys announced they have partnered to create an external hard drive that can be linked to home networks through wireless routers. The co-developed products share common instruction sets for tying the drives to consumer and business networks, and are designed to be plug-and-play additions for homes and small offices.

First off, it should come as no surprise that viruses or worms will become an increasing nuisance for smart phone users. Increasingly intelligent smart phones have all the necessary components — connectivity and operating systems — to be vulnerable to viruses. Given the fact that these devices have as much computing power as desktops of perhaps just ten years ago, the logical question is not "How did this happen?" but "What took this so long?" Looking forward, we believe that not only will smart phones be at risk; but that all types of wireless devices will become targets of virus writers as they become more and more sophisticated. In a similar vein, we are also not surprised to see wireless external hard drives coming on the market, as both small business and home users are amassing ever greater amounts of data, whether it is documents, images, or music. With datacentric applications continuing their march into every IT marketplace, everyone will need more and more storage.

As both smart phones and wireless technologies continue to spread and become ever more essential parts of enterprise networks and the people using them, a longstanding balancing act will have to be performed much more regularly. Ease of use and convenience are good for workers and their productivity, but these same factors create opportunities for networks to be compromised in completely new sets of ways. How long will it be before a Cabir-like worm will be able to infect desktops on an enterprise network? Not so very long, we suspect. Wireless networks also provide open doors to information assets, including veritable goldmines of data residing on network-attached storage systems. Those deploying the Maxtor/Linksys products should make certain that sufficient security measures are in place so that nosy strangers are unable to probe or empty hard drives, or drop something nasty onto the network by means of that same device. Despite these significant concerns, however, we believe convenience and ease of use will be prime drivers for the uptake of these technologies, trumping security issues for many businesses. That said, will effective security measures be available soon for these technologies? Perhaps, though we suspect that inevitable full-scale outbreaks of security breaches surrounding cell phones and/or wireless networks will likely add substantial energy and significance to such efforts.

Finns Award Berners-Lee IT "Survivor" Prize

By Charles King

The Finnish Technology Award Foundation announced that it would award the first-ever Millennium Technology Prize to Tim Berners-Lee, who originated the concept of and initial technology for the World Wide Web. Berners-Lee, who currently works at MIT and serves as Director of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Internet standards group originally conceived of what he referred to as "global hypertext space" while working at CERN in 1989. The Millennium Technology Prize is supported by the Finnish government and private contributors, and consists of cash valued at €1 million ($1.2 million) and a trophy. The Foundation grants the biannual Prize for outstanding innovations in one of the following fields: Energy and the Environment, Information and Communication, New Materials and Processes, or Health Care and Life Sciences.

Like most things, the creation of the World Wide Web moved forward through a series of incremental steps, in this case a search for a way to distribute and collect information and documents stored on multiple computers. Tim Berners-Lee created a number of hypertext-enabled technologies and developed a program called WorlDwidEweb, a point-and-click hypertext editor. He then deployed the first Web server, where he published the prototypes of the UDI (later URL), HTTP, and HTML specifications, insisting (with his colleague Robert Cailleau) that the technology be provided license-free to promote discussion and adoption among users. And there lies a particularly ironic rub. Since the explosive success of Web-based consumer, commercial, and business endeavors rests largely on a foundation of generous, collegial, collaborative efforts, one would think that vendors and executives who have profited handsomely from the Internet would recognize the benefits such a development model offers. Instead, many of the companies that have succeeded in delivering Web-based products and services tend make their money the old-fashioned way; by roping customers into proprietary solutions, keeping them there by hook or crook, and protecting their assumed turf by any vicious means available. This survival strategy is readily apparent in the often questionable world of IT patent law, with hardball players including Microsoft, BT, and Amazon arguing arcane chains of ownership of commonly used terms and processes.

Such loony claims make Tim Berners-Lee's Millennium Technology Prize all the sweeter, since it allows some of the Internet's seemingly endless revenue stream to be enjoyed by someone who actually deserves a bit of it. In fact, the justice of Berners-Lee's prize shares certain elements with the $1 million America's Tribal Council award recently given to Rupert Boneham. Boneham, a hirsute, tie-dyed participant in two of CBS's Survivor series, won popular acclaim by being a straight-up guy in a show dominated by backstabbing weasels, and rigorously following a code of honesty and personal loyalty that should be familiar to any U.S. school kid. The nice-guys-can-finish-first element of the story may seem a bit trite to some, but others will regard it as a refreshing change from the wheeze of laissez faire play self-congratulation so prevalent within the IT industry. Now, could someone explain to us why it was left to the Finns to recognize and reward what many would call good old American values?