Market Roundup

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IBM: Slicing the Blade for Retail

By Clay Ryder

IBM has announced new solutions based on the IBM BladeCenter targeted at retail customers who are seeking to manage remote store environments more efficiently. IBM's Systems Solutions for Retail Stores (SSRS) helps optimize technology infrastructure by consolidating all in-store servers, storage, networking, and applications in a single physical package with a common management infrastructure. The new solutions offer a pre-configured, pre-tested, and scalable platform built on two-way and four-way Intel processors, two-way POWER CPUs, or two-way AMD processors and include software, networking, and security features to support applications on Windows, Linux, and/or UNIX. SSRS can be combined with IBM Store Integration Framework, which supports a variety of physical infrastructures to provide a store-wide environment that can be remotely managed from a central data center. Point-of-sale applications from several IBM partners are also available for the SSRS with others being validated. In addition, IBM's 4690 OS is now supported on BladeCenter thus enabling the BladeCenter to act as the POS controller for 4690-based POS deployments. IBM has also integrated Symbol Technologies' WS5120 Wireless Switch to assist with wireless availability, security, and manageability while simplifying deployment and administration costs. The initial SSRS offering based on IBM BladeCenter is available today for global customers, with deployment services through IBM Services and select IBM Business Partners. Future offerings based on the IBM xSeries will target smaller stores and are expected to be available in Q3 2006.

This is the next in a succession of vertically focused IBM solutions, including Branch Banking, Security, and Business-in-a-Box for SMBs, which have been based upon its BladeCenter. As we have discussed previously, while some may at first glance see this offering as little more than a bundle of software on a BladeCenter, the reality is much more. Retail environments are a classic example of distributed resources facing the daunting challenge of consolidating dynamic sales and inventory data as well as maintaining often disparate IT implementations. By elevating this activity to a remote access scheme such as that offered through Citrix solutions, the distributed infrastructure, be it PCs, laptops, terminals, or whatnot can remain relatively untouched by application upgrades. In addition, the wireless capability brought forth by the Symbol Technology offers another path to connect a new era of devices to the centralized applications, again without disturbing existing technology. This approach does not mandate replacement of any access infrastructure, works with either thick or thin clients, and works locally or remotely. A consistent user experience is much more likely and is granted across a variety of access methods all with reduced operational headaches. Access technology that may be nearing the end of its design life for local application support could find an extension to its useful life, which would in turn afford organizations more control over capital expenditure. For retail operations with access terminals or computers aging upwards of a decade, additional flexibility in the refresh cycle is no trivial concern.

While initial offerings are clearly targeted at larger organizations, appropriately scaled solutions for the SMB are planned. Although from a sheer numbers standpoint the larger the distributed installation, the more absolute efficiency gained, the fundamental approach of this offering should prove appealing organizations of more modest scale. Nevertheless, we are intrigued with offerings such as this and are pleased to see continued investment in blade-based solutions as general purpose computing platforms as well as specialized platforms.

EMC Documentum Tackles Information Beast: Integrates Google Desktop with ECI

By *Joyce Tompsett Becknell*

This week EMC announced it was adding an adapter for Google Desktop for Enterprise, as the newest information source for EMC Documentum Enterprise Content Integration (ECI) services. EMC's ECI is a product designed to allow users to use a single query to find and access information from multiple sources including applications, databases, Web sites, or repositories. With today's announcement, EMC now has adapters for all of Google's search capabilities, allowing users to search their own desktops as well as enterprise information sources. EMC describes its solution as adding a layer of virtualization atop all internal and external content sources that provides a single access point. Adapters are used to connect to the source and the query broker manages multiple search techniques including federated searches, query expansion, and foreign language translation. With the Google Desktop for Enterprise edition, video, photos, email, and other unstructured data on the desktop can now be searched as well as structured data.

The Google Desktop search was the first in its class to launch, with Yahoo and Microsoft quickly following up with similar products. One of the concerns that people soon had with these products was security and the ability to control something that was essentially free and downloadable by any user with Internet access. Some have argued that enterprise-level desktop searches should be avoided, as cached Web pages with secure information (for example) can be accessed if the tool is not configured appropriately. However, the truth is that good desktop indexing is a much-needed capability and inevitable in the steady march of technology. The greatest problem in the information age—and the flip side of the fear that anyone can access your data—is the fear that you can access data in unmanageable amounts that are unable to fit into usable context, rendering that data mostly meaningless. Or worse yet, without context or in a limited context that gives you a potentially inaccurate picture. Documentum of course is aimed at solving all these problems, and EMC is slowly but surely building the right application to take on this meta-challenge. Incorporating enterprise desktop search is a sensible idea. Most companies are either just beginning to work out the sheer size of the problem or they are doing things piecemeal; taking on subgroups of data or applications at a time. They are sometimes being forced along particularly in industries such as financial services or healthcare, where legislation will compel them to have solutions before they might organically grow into them.

For end users, the joy of the Documentum approach is in having one application to do the searching. While the document management market itself is fragmented with many companies providing solutions with no single dominant player, content management is a growing concern that everyone wants to be part of. Content providers were the first wave, and then the conventional wisdom decided it was management of that content, not creation, that was the ticket to success. For users, this ties in to business intelligence and analytics programs, as business faces a near unbelievable amount of data from a plethora of sources and no easy way to find the connection between diverse information. EMC, with its background in storage, combined with the companies it has acquired over the years, believes it has the right approach to tackling the information beast. While we believe market maturity is still off on the horizon, we also believe that EMC is taking an accessible, customer-friendly approach to the problem and giving the IT organization some control by integrating the Google Desktop search into ECI, with a single point for end users and enough engine beneath it to make it truly useful and manageable.

Which is Better, a Partitioned OS or a Partitioned Machine?

By *Clay Ryder*

It has been reported that SWsoft is seeking to have OpenVZ, a virtualization technology, integrated into the Linux kernel. In addition, Red Hat has indicated that it would include the virtualization technology into its free Linux distribution known as Fedora. OpenVZ is an open-source underpinning to Virtuozzo, which is sold by SWsoft. OpenVZ divides a single instance of Linux into multiple virtual servers, conceptually similar to that of Solaris 10 containers, but with each operating as if it were a unique server. This approach to virtualization differs from that of VMware or other Hypervision-based approaches that create a virtual instance of a server upon which multiple operating systems may reside.

Virtualization and Linux: a couple of contemporary buzz words if ever there were any. Neither of these are new concepts; however, for the vast majority of Linux users, if they are in a virtualized environment, it is due to a discrete software add-on or a hardware level implementation of virtualization. What SWsoft is hoping to accomplish is to have the Linux kernel found in the mainstream distributions being virtualization ready, through open source software that the company is fond of. There are other similar solutions available, but OpenVZ has received the backing of Red Hat, which of course is non-trivial in itself.

What catches our thought on this is not whether OpenVZ is or is not the leader in this space, or that SWsoft wants to have it christened the virtualization solution for Linux. Rather, the question to us is whether virtualization that is dependent upon one operating system per machine the long-term winner in the marketplace. While we are rather fond of hardware-based virtualizations, software approaches such as VMware or Xen are quite capable, and do support multiple operating systems on a machine. In fact, Xen is already slated to be included in SUSE 10 later this year. Given the push for efficiency evident in the marketplace, combined with a best-of-breed approach to applications and operating systems, virtualization schemes that do not support multiple OSes seem to achieve less than the full potential of virtualization. Granted, if an organization has only Linux workloads, this is a moot point. But Linux-only organizations are not in the majority, as most Linux users are adding the OS to a mix of existing technologies. While one could argue that the OpenVZ technology is complementary to a VMware for example, the question is begged: why slice up Linux at the OS level when the underlying system already supports multiple instantiations of any operating system? A rational reason someone might want to do so could probably be found, but we believe that for the majority, this would not be the case. Nevertheless, we foresee that there will be multiple approaches to virtualization for quite some time, as each seeks to provide the user with a way to enhance the ROI of their existing IT investments. For users, this is a message that is unlikely to generate a lot of push back.

iAnywhere Introduces Sales Anywhere

By *Susan Dietz*

iAnywhere has introduced Sales Anywhere for the Salesforce.com AppExchange on-demand platform. The offering provides instant access to AppExchange through wireless or synchronized connections to deliver over 150 software choices to Windows Mobile, Palm OS, or BlackBerry devices. Sales Anywhere is a hosted service that provides full read-and-write access to Salesforce.com accounts, contacts, tasks, etc. with minimal deployment effort. The aim is to improve productivity and sales effectiveness by allowing the salesperson to access company AppExchange programs while away from the office. Sales Anywhere for AppExchange is now available for test drive and deployment at www.appexchange.com, in conjunction with the Salesforce Winter '06 release.

Anything that increases efficiency and productivity is a boon to small businesses, which often operate on the edge of the profit/loss line. It is for just this reason that in order to be adapted by small businesses, a new technology must first be proven to work. Salesforce.com has developed a much respected brand and it only makes sense for it to try and leverage that brand in other ways. We believe that this announcement is another proof point as to the potential of selling software as a service, with mobility being a differentiating edge. Providing access to software as a complete service with monthly electronic billing and presumably automatic upgrades is the trajectory of consumer and small business software. In general, neither consumers nor small businesses want to deal with buying, installing, and updating software—an unnecessary hassle for those who aren't tech-minded. Security concerns, one of the largest hindrances to the widespread adaptation of package software delivery, are being dealt with in a different way, with the threats of viruses and malware being restricted to a single source location. So while it is far from time to pronounce that shrinkwrap software applications as we know them are dead, it will prove interesting to see how receptive the market is to this package, which implies a much more remote while connected user.