
Market Roundup

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IBM Hones Its Blade Offerings

By Joyce Tompsett Becknell

IBM has announced new blade products this week that the company believes will leave competitors far behind on multiple fronts. The star of the announcement was the BladeCenter H, with H standing for high-performance. Designed for data-intensive, high-bandwidth applications such as life sciences and corporate analytics, the new H systems have a new 10GB fabric that supports four 10GB channels to each blade. Like other versions of the BladeCenter, the new H comes in a chassis that supports up to fourteen blades in one enclosure, and checks in at 9U. In addition to the BladeCenter H, IBM also announced the nine-core IBM Cell processor-based blade, the first Cell-based product available from IBM. This blade is intended for compute-intensive workloads and broadband media applications and is also the first multi-core blade computer. The BladeCenter JS21 is a dual-core Power-based blade with built-in virtualization. This blade is targeted at bioinformatics, grid computing, retail, manufacturing, and petroleum research. The JS21 is targeted at performance with IBM producing a variety of benchmark scores highlighting its speed. A BladeCenter HS20 billed as an ultra low power Intel-based blade was also launched. This is a dual-core blade with the best performance per watt of electricity for customers worried about power and cooling. The Cisco InfiniBand Switch Module is a 4x InfiniBand switch from Cisco and IBM that provides high-speed interconnect capability, designed specifically for the BladeCenter H.

While blades are not a panacea for all server environments, they are certainly one of the more popular and growing markets for many enterprises. IBM has been a leader, competing strongly with HP for market domination, and it appears that this latest batch has enough edges to catch most blade-users interest. IBM wants to use blades to help simplify computing, offer customers a wider range of choice, and transform the market. The new Advanced Management Module should make blade management easier, and native virtualization should help with AIX consolidation and life sciences applications. Choice is evident in the range of processors and form factors for blades, but interestingly, IBM also indicated that Solaris 10 can be run on the blades although not HP UX. In fact IBM positions itself as twice the performance at half the price with certain models. Now that blades are no longer a novelty as a form factor, vendors will have to take advantage of their modularity to provide a range of needs from speed to efficiency, with a range of technology choices. IBM, more than any other vendor, has opened this market up, offering both Intel and AMD blades in addition to the Power5 and Cell processor. Customers seriously considering blade solutions should be able to find an appropriate model with IBM.

IBM has also announced that blade.org has been formed and that there are now more than 700 partners in the BladeCenter ecosystem. They are well on their way to evolving this community. Along with Power.org, IBM now has two collaborative communities growing around IBM core technologies, and has even managed to combine products from both communities in one offering (the Cell-based blade.) The next step is for IBM to combine BladeCenter with offerings from its ecosystem partners to make solution packages for customers and business partners. IBM has some systems solutions available already, such as a retail store-in-a-box and solutions for branch banking that are good examples of blade solutions. With these solutions, IBM will need to join up with Partnerworld to combine the products with the services capabilities of partners to complete the cycle and deliver true end-to-end solutions to the greatest part of the market. We look forward to seeing this ecosystem continue to evolve.

EMC's Insignia Helping SMBs

By *Susan Dietz*

EMC has released Insignia, a suite of products specifically designed for SMBs seeking an affordable way to store, manage, share, and back up data. The products are designed to be able to work independently, together, or with third-party software and hardware. The six product offerings include EMC's CLARiiON AX Series disk arrays, which enable SMBs to consolidate and share storage efficiently among multiple computers; Storage Administrator for Exchange SMB Edition information management software that works with the EMC CLARiiON AX series to simplify management of Microsoft Exchange Server data and provide fast recovery from an Exchange server failure; Retrospect, which gives SMBs a way to protect servers, 24x7 applications, desktops, and notebooks; RepliStor SMB Edition, which guards SMB's vital information against hardware failure or site-wide disaster, provides replication of data between two Windows computers either locally or remotely across the Internet and also maintains a continuously updated copy; VisualSRM SMB Edition, a storage resource management software solution; and eRoom SMB Edition, which brings efficiency to how employees, partners, and suppliers work together by using collaboration software. The applications are priced separately (from Retrospect at \$399 to CLARiiON starting at \$5500) and can be deployed collectively or purchased a la carte and deployed on a discrete basis.

With these latest offerings, EMC has brought together several SMB-focused products under a umbrella brand, another sign of its continued commitment to cultivating and growing this market segment. As to why the company targets SMBs, it remains steadfast in its knowledge that SMBs are the fastest growing market segment and have been known to lead the way with business innovation and practices. It has long been known that small and medium-size businesses are the backbone of the United States economy; however, in terms of business needs, this segment of the market is often overlooked. SMBs most often have to "make do" either with software designed for PCs, or with software and hardware designed for larger organizations that must often be scaled down to size, which fits their needs about as well as a ten-year-old trying to wear her older sister's prom dress. That said, while EMC has been investing in this marketplace for some time, establishing Insignia as an umbrella SMB brand is a smart move to us. This could have the two-pronged effect of establishing an SMB-friendly name, something EMC traditionally has not been associated with, as well as having a segment-specific brand upon which many other offerings could come. In some ways, Insignia could be used in much the same way as Cisco uses Linksys to court SMB while also using Insignia similar to the way IBM uses Express to connote SMB-focused solutions. Having choices that fit a customer's need is always good as is focused segmented competition. With this in mind, we believe that EMC's Insignia is well positioned to help the company further its SMB initiatives.

An NEC with a Knack for Fault Tolerance

By *Clay Ryder*

NEC Solutions has announced the NEC Express5800/320Ma Fault Tolerant (FT) server. This offering is designed to have less than five minutes of downtime per year and is targeted at organizations where high availability is paramount. The Express5800/320Ma comes with a simplified architecture, enhanced speed, memory, and management capabilities, which the company states delivers greater performance per cost and a higher ROI through a lower TCO. Among the new features are twin Customer Replaceable Units (CRUs) as opposed to the previous four-CRU approach; optional Active Upgrade Support enables software and system upgrades without rebooting through virtual split of the server system; and Virtual Technician and Remote Management Boards enhanced customer features, video re-direction, and redundancy in each module without consuming additional throughput. Included with the server is the NEC ExpressCluster Self Recovery Edition, which monitors and restores application functionality at the operation system and application levels. The self-reporting tool monitors the application processes and can reboot the server if applications are not restarted after a pre-set number of retries. This is in addition to integrated management software that allows administrators to optimize server operations by tracking long and short-term performance, server usage, trends, and server failure rates. These enhanced management systems can be accessed locally or remotely. The Express5800/320Ma features Intel Xeon

processors and fault-tolerant technology, and is a Microsoft Windows-based solution available in three configurations: a 3.2GHz or 3.6GHz single core system, and a 2.8GHz dual-core system. Up to 8GB of RAM is available for the 3.2GHz system, and 16GB for the others. The NEC Express5800/320Ma Fault Tolerant server is now available through NEC's channel partners. List prices start at \$30,000.

Not all that long ago, one could mention Fault Tolerance, and conjure up the likes of Tandem NonStops, IBM mainframes, or DEC VAX clusters. For mere mortals, FT was measured in how quickly a server could reboot and the applications get up and running again. Happily, innovation in FT technology has helped drive down the cost of FT and made it possible for the broader market to have access to this operational insurance policy. This announcement is further testimony that FT is no longer reserved for solely for the IT elite, as these offerings are built upon industry-standard x86 chips, run Windows, and can be had for a relatively low price point. This is pretty cool from our point of view.

The advantages of FT have always been known to those such as utilities, financial clearing houses, and military installations who cannot afford downtime, no matter how minimal. But for the general computing public, this is becoming more important as well. As expectations of 24/7 customer service continues to grow, and globalization of all types of trade marches forth, the thought that a production server can be taken down, even for maintenance, becomes harder to accept. In FT schemes, production systems can remain operational while scheduled or unscheduled outages take place. As part of a larger distributed approach to IT, FT can bring solace to harried systems administrators who now can schedule routine maintenance during more normal hours, as opposed to Monday morning at 1am. For unscheduled outages, disaster recovery from catastrophic events is afforded by connecting two disparately located servers with ExpressCluster software. While the advantages of FT are too numerous to spout in this short forum, suffice it to say that we are encouraged by this offering and the general raising of the FT bar it achieves in the industry standard server marketplace.

HP to Acquire OuterBay

By Clay Ryder

HP has signed a definitive agreement to acquire OuterBay, a provider of archival software for enterprise applications and databases. OuterBay's ADM Suite allows users to move data between storage tiers based on its current value to the business, and maintain open access to archived data across applications, platforms, and storage media. As a result, OuterBay improves enterprise application and database performance and seeks to help organizations manage database growth; and will add to HP's growing portfolio of ILM solutions. In addition, the technology will enable HP to expand its offerings for customers deploying Oracle, SQLServer, and Sybase databases as well as enterprise applications such as Oracle E-Business Suite, SAP, and PeopleSoft. HP stated that together with its recent purchases of AppIQ and Peregrine Systems, the OuterBay acquisition is part of its strategy to bolster its server, storage, and software offerings. Financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed. The transaction is subject to certain closing conditions and is expected to be completed within the next two weeks. Following completion, OuterBay will be substantially integrated into the StorageWorks division of HP's Technology Solutions Group.

This announcement is another example of the continuing efforts on the part of storage vendors to acquire value-added software providers to bolster the capabilities and competitiveness of their storage offerings. While EMC may hold the lead in this ongoing digestion of all things ILM, HP too has been active in this regard, and for many of the same reasons. OuterBay brings HP another important set of ILM tools, namely ones that focus on the burgeoning size of DB solutions in the organizations today. Given the growth in relational data stores, it is only a matter of time before organizations will be compelled to examine and ultimately prioritize their DB storage. For many, the notion of archiving inactive data may be relatively straightforward; however, on a manual basis, this is anything but so. Hence, just one simple example of the need for tools such as those from OuterBay. Overall, we are heartened to see HP continue running the competitive race for storage, and not settle for being simply an OEM supplier of some disks. As part of a strategic systems approach, ILM is an essential component, one that we are pleased to see that HP and others continue to recognize.