Market Roundup

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Cisco Improves Branch Office Solutions with New Offerings

By Joyce Tompsett Becknell

Cisco has announced an integrated branch office solution that accelerates performance of TCP-based applications across wide area networks (WAN). IT managers can use this technology to consolidate branch office infrastructure, including servers, storage, and backup infrastructure to lower costs and ease management. The solution includes the recently launched Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS), a comprehensive solution that includes scalable branch office networking software for WAN optimization, application acceleration, and Wide Area File Services in a single solution. Cisco also launched a network module for running WAAS software on the Cisco integrated services router. According to Cisco, the branch office solution combines with Cisco Application Networking Services and is designed to scale to support thousands of branch offices and up to millions of TCP connections with up to 16 gigabits per second performance in a fully-scaled, load-balanced deployment. Cisco maintains that the solution is transparent to existing networks and helps enable a smooth integration with pre-established network security and WAN traffic policies.

As industry and governmental regulations place greater requirements on enterprises' IT infrastructure, managers are looking for ways to centralize and consolidate servers and data. They are also trying to simplify branch IT operations to lower costs and make management easier. One of the problems with consolidating to a centralized data center is the resulting latency that happens in networks. Also, packets get lost on the network and these things have a negative effect on application performance. This of course can lead to productivity problems and theoretically could wind up swapping one set of headaches for another instead of ameliorating them. It could also wind up costing firms a lot of money. For companies that are already using Cisco WAN equipment, this is a good announcement, as it leverages the technologies they already use. Customers with branch office IT issues may find this solution provides them with additional options.

Management, consolidation, and virtualization continue to be popular themes of vendor presentations and marketing literature. In part, customers are trying to do these things–improve manageability, work with fewer pieces, and make those pieces seem like even fewer—but in part these technologies are just starting to be applied to enterprise challenges as the technologies are finally beginning to mature. While server, storage, and recovery are fairly well understood mainstream technologies, the ability to use and move data over networks and at great distances is still nascent. Additionally, there are usually multiple issues involved in IT decisions: regulations, cost issues, industry issues, and various internal groups are involved. In large organizations, the networking people and the computing guys may not always design projects together, and they may be unfamiliar with the various solutions available in each other's respective camps. As vendors like Cisco continue to evolve solutions from straightforward products like routers or switches to advanced networking solutions that strategically affect more than the network, they will need to spend more time educating their customer base and speaking with constituent bases within their customers that they may not have met previously. Customers have a lot to gain from these solutions, but matchmaking the optimal solution with the problem is getting ever more complex and isn't likely to simplify any time soon. IT managers who are not up to speed on the networking aspects within their organizations should make sure they understand the strategic direction that network managers are taking to be able to take advantage of these new technologies.

Silicon Valley Gets Wired

By *Susan Dietz*

Silicon Valley is set to become a free WiFi hot spot. The open-network Silicon Valley Metro Connect has announced that it will offer universal broadband wireless Internet access covering forty-two municipalities and nearly 1,500 square miles. Beyond providing wireless access to the general public, the network will also be capable of supporting a broad range of uses by residential, small business, public sector, and commercial users. The Silicon Valley Metro Connect team, including companies such as IBM, Cisco Systems, Azulstar Networks, and SeaKay, will build the network based on the latest Cisco Systems mesh wireless infrastructure technology, with a technology upgrade program to ensure long-term network vitality and scalability. IBM will provide network design and integration services, as well as technology applications for public agencies and local utilities. Azulstar Networks will act as the network operator for service provisioning of the 802.11b/g base wireless network. SeaKay will work with municipal and public benefit agencies to customize the network to their needs, and will also spearhead outreach and digital inclusion programs to meet the economic development and social benefit objectives of the network. A social benefit objective includes providing an alternative communications medium to first responders— fire, police, and emergency medical—when traditional communications systems may not interoperate. Silicon Valley Metro Connect is a privately owned and operated network which will be supported by a sponsorship format. The goal of sponsorship is to ensure a diverse stream of revenues, with the goal of providing the network the needed financial resources to weather changes in technology and the economic environment over time. The wireless network will offer up to 1Mb data speed for the free service. It will also include digital divide programs for economically disadvantaged users. For those who wish to upgrade, premium fee-based services such as wireless VoIP and video streaming will be available. Beginning in 2007, the Silicon Valley Wireless Network will leverage the WiMAX IEEE 802.16 wireless standard for the 2-11 GHz operating bands, to offer greater throughput for mobile and fixed users and higher quality service for video, voice, and data.

Internet access for everyone is all good, but what about security and other implementation issues? True, any illusion of privacy on the Internet is a pipe dream, but WiFi security still pales before that of the hardwired connection. Even so, with a free public service being available, perhaps driving around the metro area until finding an open, unprotected access point will become less appealing. It's not quite clear from the announcement what the "protection of user privacy" really means, but the parameters of that user privacy should be made clear to everyone, probably every time they sign on. Just as one would not make sensitive phone calls from the pay phone at the train station, one should not be undertaking sensitive activites on a public, free, wireless network. Still, there is an element of "caveat emptor" for everyone in cyberspace these days, and any person who wishes for true privacy and anonymity should most likely stay off the Internet altogether.

But at what level will the Silicon Valley Wireless Network compete with local businesses? What will the local internet cafes, WiFi hot spots, or hotel room access have to offer if the population is signing on for free, besides the essential coffee? Local government competing with local business is usually a very bad idea, not least because it ultimately undermines the tax base. But perhaps the hot spots and Internet cafes can offer faster connections, or more security, or support for hardware and software issues: the value-added approach. One thing that is not in any shortage in Silicon Valley is creativity, so we expect the small business owners will be able to adapt and perhaps even thrive, in spite of the new competition.

HP Busy: New OpenView Configuration Manager, Workstation, Notebooks, Desktops, and Flat Panel Monitors

By *Tony Lock*

This week in Europe HP released information on a raft of new Business Notebooks, Desktops, Flat Panel Monitors, and a Workstation. The devices are all designed to be reliable and easy to use with special emphasis on security to help customers better utilize the systems to garner additional productivity. All of the systems released are compliant with the European Reduction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) directive. To

round off the announcement, HP also announced enhancements to its hardware and software configuration management solution. HP OpenView Client Configuration Manager 2.0 is software designed to reduce the complexity associated with managing PCs, thereby improving availability while saving system administrators time and the business money. In addition, HP announced that for the first time all commercial HP laptops, desktops, and workstations will begin shipping with a pre-loaded HP OpenView Configuration Management agent to help further drive down PC manageability costs.

On the laptop/tablet side HP announced that the 9400, 8400, 7400, 6400, 6300, and 4400 Series will be available with Intel Core2 Duo processors. The machines come in a range of specifications making them suitable for a wide range of business users with differing requirements. All are optimized to consume less power thereby extending battery performance. In addition the new machines are Windows Vista capable. All systems are available in Europe with immediate effect. In the Desktop arena HP provided details of the HP Compaq dc7700, dc5700 and dc5750 Desktop PCs. The PCs feature a suite of HP ProtectTools security, including a standard Trusted Platform Module (TPM) 1.2 embedded security chip. The top end dc7700 will also be made available with the Intel vPro technology as it becomes available. The dc5750 will feature AMD's "Cool 'n' Quiet" technology. All machines come with a selection of manageability tools including HP's Backup and Recovery Manager Software. Certain models will also be pre-loaded with HP's Smart Desktop Management Service. All are Microsoft Windows Vista compatible and will be available from late September and October. HP is also making enhancements to its Client Manager. HP's new xw9400 Workstation is a high-power, expandable platform built on AMD processors. The dual-core, dual-processor personal workstation system has great computational and I/O power coupled with dual high-end graphics. The company went on to announce three new Flat Panel monitors: the LP1965, the L2045w high-definition 20-inch widescreen format panel, and the LP3065 with a 30-inch wide aspect, HP's first entry into the so-called mammoth screen arena.

These announcements demonstrate once again that HP is determined to maintain its position in Europe among the leading suppliers of a wide range of business focussed PCs, Laptops, Tablets, and workstations. As one would expect, the machines all feature excellent characteristics in the technology deployed, be it in terms of processors or graphics. However, it is the increasing visibility that HP is placing on the ongoing management of the machines that really catches the eye. Maintaining business desktops and laptops can be a time-consuming and costly affair, although too often such details are hidden in the overall IT budget. All vendors are seeking ways to lower the lifetime costs of their machines and it is good to see HP highlight management. It will be fascinating to see how much value organizations place on these management features versus traditional CPU/weight/screen size/purchase price factors. It will also be interesting to note how quickly the new 30-inch Flat Panel Monitor makes inroads into a market that is ripe for expansion.