Market Roundup

October 13, 2006

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IBM Site and Facilities Services: Is This Data Center Feng Shui?

By *Joyce Tompsett Becknell*

IBM announced new services this week to deal with energy-related challenges in the data center. The services encompass a range of capabilities that will be available from IBM's Site and Facilities Services unit and are another step in IBM's strategy to move their labor-based technology services into a product-oriented mode that can benefit a greater range of customers. IBM is introducing five new service products, including High Density Computing Readiness Assessment, which helps customers gauge the effect of high-density computing on their existing data center; Thermal Analysis for High Density Computing, which identifies and resolves heat-related issues likely to lead to outages; Integrated Rack Solution for High-Density Computing, which helps customers design, deploy, and manage racking solutions for new technologies; Data Center Global Consolidation and Relocation Enablement, which provides plans to help customers reduce costs by consolidating and relocating data centers; and Scalable Modular Data Center for SMBs, which is designed to help customers install new data centers using modular building blocks. IBM claims to have more than 450 Site and Facility experts who have built more than 2.8 million square meters of data center space and more than 400 data centers in IBM's own facilities. Overall, the group focuses on four areas: data center and facilities strategy services; IT facilities assessment, design, and construction services; IT facilities consolidation and relocation services; and specialized facilities services focusing on intelligent and green buildings, clean rooms, and trading floors. IBM will offer these services as part of its CoolBlue portfolio of hardware and systems management tools. These products focus on helping customers better optimize power consumption, management, and cooling of infrastructure at the system, rack, and data center levels.

Blade computing is a form factor for computing that is gaining popularity in the data center as a way to provide high-density computing for applications that can lead to better manageability and lower costs. The trick, however, is that while blades typically take up one-eighth the amount of space of a 1U rack server, they have ten times the density, which means that while individual servers may be lower power than their rack alternatives, the reality is that blade chassis are an heat-intensive experience for data centers that were designed with traditional racks in mind. Additionally, many IT managers and business people are just beginning to think about the notion of saving money on the power bills by changing the data center. In many European countries, the cost of electricity and gas has been rising steadily for the last eighteen months. The largest companies are painfully aware of the impact of the data center on their bottom line, but many other companies have not yet started to focus on this aspect yet. What is more likely to be a concern to IT managers is how hot their servers are running. Most office buildings in North America are no longer heated; they are only cooled because all of the systems running inside keep them warm. In large data centers full of computers, cooling can become a major issue. It is not uncommon to hear discussions of alternative cooling methods in certain environments. IBM of course believes that it spans the range of needs, from helping companies sort out the impact of replacing racks with blade chassis, to helping managers of large data centers work out alternate cooling solutions when not all the fans in the world will cut it.

This announcement of a new set of productized-services from IBM comes on the heels of its announcement a couple of weeks ago of a reorganization and change of focus for its technology services. IBM led with integrated communications and now it is following with data center power and cooling; all very practical issues from which

myriad customers can benefit if IBM can work out how to get those services to a greater number of users. IBM claims to be driving this through its CoolBlue portfolio, but in typical IBM fashion, if you go to the website and type in CoolBlue, you get lots of references to press releases and no page that explains everything in a straightforward manner. We believe that data center managers need assistance and can benefit from IBM's expertise in this situation; however, as always Big Blue is its own biggest obstacle to success. If it can get a clear message out to partners, and articulate how to buy to a range of customers, we anticipate a boost to blade server sales as well.

Apex and AppExchange: Winter '07 is Here and IT Looks Interesting Again

By Tony Lock

This week in San Francisco, Salesforce.com held Dreamforce '06, its annual customer and partner show at which there was a flurry of announcements covering the company's core application offerings and its partner application delivery platform, AppExchange. Some of these are potentially of great significance. At the start of the show, the company highlighted a number of new and updated capabilities to be released later this year when Salesforce Winter '07 is released. Salesforce Winter '07 will be the twenty-first generation of the company's software and, as a Software as a Service (SaaS) offering, it will be deployed to the entire customer base at the same time. Among the new features are a new Business Web Desktop and AJAX User Interface that combine to make user interaction more intuitive and flexible. There will also be significant feature enhancements to the entire Salesforce suite. Amongst the specific features of the new release of the CRM and the Salesforce Automation (SFA) components are Custom Workflows and Approvals, new integration with Lotus Notes, a new AJAX Calendar, and Automated Reminders as pop-ups. The Service & Support tools introduce a Call Centre Edition that supports call centre products from Cisco, Nortel, Avaya, and Genesys as well as on demand solutions including Pandora and Five 9. The solution provides a fully integrated Softphone and automatic call logging. Salesforce Partner Relationship Management (PRM) now offers Activity Sharing, Custom Price Books, and Product Line Items along with Shared Metrics. Salesforce Marketing now includes Salesforce for Google AdWords allowing Google keywords to be purchased and usage tracked within the product.

To say the least, there is a lot going on at Salesforce.com and AppExchange. However, the most important development is the fact that the entire suite and AppExchange are now built on top of the Apex Platform. Apex will allow customers and ISVs to utilize the same language and platform to build and modify applications running on the Salesforce.com platform itself. Essentially Apex will allow organizations to modify existing Salesforce and AppExchange application execution in a controlled manner with all code running of the Salesforce platform itself. Utilizing the Apex Programming Language will allow customers and ISVs to do everything from creating custom objects, buttons. and execution triggers, modifying Salesforce.com code execution to building and executing complex business logic with everything running in the Salesforce.com environment.

The Winter '07 release is scheduled to be available to all 24,800 customers and their 501,000 subscribers during the fourth quarter of 2006. The Apex platform will be available with the Winter '07 release while the Apex programming language is scheduled to be available in the first half of 2007.

It is clear that Salesforce.com has now become so much more than simply a supplier of CRM applications as a service. Indeed, the company is now keen to position Salesforce.com as an information management company, and in many respects this is a fair description. We believe there is no doubt at all that while the family of on demand solutions built by Salesforce.com is very good and the model of on demand service delivery saves many organizations time and effort, it is the AppExchange Platform and now Apex that will become the most important parts of the company. AppExchange makes available a secure, very highly available, and trusted SaaS platform that now has over 400 applications available for immediate customer use. We believe that SaaS will become a major model for software delivery in the years ahead, and not just for SMBs. The AppExchange platform has grown rapidly in its first year and it will be interesting to see how Salesforce looks to stretch it beyond its Relationship Management heartland.

Apex and the new business Web Desktop allow customers tremendous flexibility to make the available applications fit their business processes quickly and with minimum risk. But for Apex and AppExchange to become as widely employed as possible, Salesforce.com needs to reach out to new customers and new partners, both ISVs and service delivery organizations. It must also attract an entirely new community to Salesforce, namely software developers. If Salesforce can make Apex attractive and interesting to developers, Apex and AppExchange could rapidly become incredibly important and even more widely deployed. To our way of thinking, there is much potential here.

Isilon's Data Storage System

By *Susan Dietz*

Isilon Systems has announced the release of a unified file system, the OneFS4.5, that provides ubiquitous access to digital content and unstructured data. This is the next-generation Isilon IQ clustered storage software system, and can power all of Isilon's family of clustered storage software systems, including the Isilon IQ 1920, 3000, 6000, Accelerator, and EX 6000. With this release, Isilon will deliver 1PB capacity with 10GBps throughput in a single file system and volume while seeking to eliminate the cost and complexity barriers of traditional storage architectures. The data protection system allows customers to withstand the loss of three or four simultaneous disks or nodes within very large clusters while maintaining 100% availability of all of the data. The data protection system is called N+3 and N+4. The stated goal of the new OneFS 4.5 system is to let enterprises bring their huge data archives online, thereby making them as accessible as any other critical business information.

Once upon a time, computer storage used to be measured by megabytes. Isilon's position in the storage arena seems to be generating quite a buzz with its introduction of mega storage, and has perhaps contributed to Isilon's recent application for an IPO. In conjunction with other recent announcements, these products may just be what Isilon hopes will launch it into the big leagues. With recent legislation concerning electronic discovery laws, storage systems and quick and easy access to data are suddenly much more important to a company's success. Legal fees are bad enough, but paying those fees for every hour that the legal team is pawing through a year's worth of data could conceivably break some companies. So while storage and its organization may not be glamorous, it is vitally important. Isilon's new system may not rock the entire market, but it does seem to raise the bar. The ability of the system to protect data from spontaneous loss is likely to be one of the more important selling points for the customers.

The field of data storage has come into its own and is no longer an afterthought when a company sets up or renovates its IT department. Data storage and its management are now just as—if not more—important than processor speeds and desktop applications. As the challenge for companies is to keep all of their data and not just the most current at their fingertips, it will most likely positively affect business models across the board from sales and customer service, to accounting, to electronic discovery. A customer's entire history could be accessible to anyone in the company at any time, most likely increasing sales and ensuring the customer has a positive experience regardless of which person within the company is their contact. Of course, saying all this and doing it are two different things. We shall watch with anticipation to see if Isilon is successful is cultivating market acceptance for its approach.