



Instant Insight

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HP Announces "Service-Centric Computing" Tools/Solutions

By Jim Balderston

Hewlett-Packard announced over fifty new products and software solutions that the company described as providing the infrastructure for "service-centric computing," where everything is connected and computing is provisioned, delivered, metered and purchased as a service. HP also claims its new products and solutions, which fall into four major areas, will improve customers' returns on assets, reduce operational costs and enable new revenue streams. The new products and solutions fall into four major areas:

HP Utility Data Center with Utility Controller Software, which allows a heterogeneous data center to be virtually rewired and reprovisioned to provide infrastructure and other IT services on demand.

- ◆ HP OpenView announced new products that allow enterprises and SPs to perform proactive, reactive and predictive management of the service infrastructure and its individual components. Additionally, the company announced that it is in discussions with BEA to initiate a strategic alliance for e-business software solutions, including co-marketing and sales initiatives around BEA WebLogic and HP's OpenView.
- ◆ HP OpenView Internet Usage Manager, which provides an SP-focused scalable platform for deploying convergent mediation and management solutions, has been enhanced to support layer 7 usage data collection, strengthening the integration of billing systems and other billing support applications.
- ◆ HP's Netaction product family will offer thirteen new middleware and communication products to enable the development, integration and deployment of new voice, data and mobile services.

Pricing/Availability

Pricing details were not included in the announcements. The new offerings are expected to begin shipping later this month.

Net/Net

Make no mistake; HP's announcement is certainly comprehensive in scope. With fifty separate products in motion, including free distribution of the Netaction Application Server 8.0, HP has joined the ranks of major vendors who wish to provide the infrastructure and foundation for what we call Service Computing. HP prefers the phrase "service-centric computing," and for the time being we have no quibble with that term. But we do think the HP has, once again, understated the salient points of an important initiative by overstating its technical components, and in turn, may have missed an opportunity to state unequivocally

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just how meaningful this set of announcements are to its present customers and the market at large. In other words, HP only took a small bite of the apple, instead of chewing right down to the core.

Overall, HP appears to be moving in the right direction. The coming of the Service Computing environment is inevitable to our way of thinking, and HP's announcements make it clear, we believe, that the company understands this inevitability as well. The ability to manage complex, heterogeneous data centers is a key element of the foundation needed for Service Computing. The OpenView Integrated Service Assurance Solution is an integral component of this offering, as it is designed to automate the repair and adjustments needed to the infrastructure in real time. Here we see a parallel development to IBM's eLiza infrastructure "self-healing" initiative, and in general terms HP seems to be moving in step with IBM's larger "autonomic computing" thrust in the marketplace. In fact, HP's potential alliances with BEA suggest that the company is highly aware of the benefits that IBM's WebSphere e-business products offer its greater hardware initiatives.

But we do not believe that HP is merely mimicking IBM with these announcements. To the contrary, it is clear to us that the folks in Palo Alto really grasp the significance of the wholesale changes that are about to sweep through the IT industry and enterprises at large. But IBM has taken this idea a step further, specifically talking about how these changes will impact enterprises and their employees. And that's the rub, as far as we are concerned, when it comes to HP's announcements. HP stopped short of really declaring just how fundamental an impact the Service Computing (or, in HP-speak, "service-centric computing") environment is going to have on Line of Business people. This, we believe, is where large IT vendors will have to make their sales pitches if they wish to drive new purchases.

While IT personnel are sure to find comfort in HP's offerings and its realization of new demands placed on IT in a Service Computing model, it is not clear that the company really understands how the roles of LOB personnel will change in the coming years. We believe that in a Service Computing model, LOB staff will take a much more active role in choosing which applications, in which configurations, go to which desktops. In essence, LOB staff will deploy applications on an ad hoc basis; much in the same way they deployed side-doored PCs and departmental networks in the past. The importance of recognizing the inevitability of this development is paramount to successful market penetration. Line of Business staff will build these new application environments, which will allow the development of such "populist" computing decisions as are now taking shape. LOB staff will not shy away from taking advantage of this opportunity. The only question for enterprises and IT staff to answer is simple: Will they go along with such activity or attempt to impede it, thereby dragging down productivity and potential returns on investment?

With these announcements, HP has only pitched half the story, in our opinion. Certainly IT staff will need these products and services to deliver required network stability and flexibility demanded by a Service Computing environment. For this, the company deserves kudos. But until we hear HP talking about how these new offerings are going to allow for LOB staff to build out what they need when they need it, we believe that HP is missing a key element of the next revolution in enterprise IT deployments.

That is not to say that HP cannot or will not do so in the future. In fact, it appears to us that the company has laid a foundation for doing just that. But HP will have to recognize that its intense focus on IT staff in selling products and services is going to require adjustment and recalibration within the emerging Service Computing environment. Selling infrastructure for the sake of infrastructure is not going to cut it. It must be tied to how these products are going to facilitate Line of Business' inevitable taking of control of desktop computing environments.

Until then, we see an apple left largely uneaten. Rather than risk spoiling such a potentially tasty fruit, it is time for HP to take another bite or two.

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