



Market Roundup

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IBM/Oxford/UK Government Announce "eDiamond" Mammography Grid

AOL to Treat Members Like Members (Not Customers)

Correcting a Significant Omission: XML 1.1 Moves to Candidate Recommendation

Sun, HDS, IBM, Veritas Announce CIM Product Rollout

NAI Offers Professional Services

IBM/Oxford/UK Government Announce "eDiamond" Mammography Grid

By Charles King

IBM, Oxford University, and the UK government this week announced plans to build a computing grid to enable early screening and diagnosis of breast cancer, and to provide information to assist in the treatment of the disease. The project, code-named "eDiamond" by Oxford researchers, will cost approximately \$6 million and will be the first grid built entirely with commercially available technology. The project is part of the UK government's eScience program, which is designed to carry out large-scale science efforts via distributed, Internet-enabled global collaborations. Initially, eDiamond will link a large database of mammograms at four hospitals and breast screening centers, but could be utilized across ninety-two screening centers throughout the UK. The grid will consist of IBM pSeries and xSeries servers, workstations, and disk and tape storage systems, and will also utilize software developed by Mirada Systems to standardize new and existing digital mammogram images. Additionally, patient, diagnostic, and treatment information will be securely encoded in every image file. Eventually, the eDiamond project could be expanded to create a worldwide digital mammography grid by linking up with similar programs in France, Germany, Japan, and the U.S. No schedule or timeline for the project was included in the announcement.

To better understand what the eDiamond intends to be, it helps to understand how it differs from other grids. First, eDiamond is a data grid as opposed to a computing grid. That is, it is designed to facilitate the acquisition, storage, and usage of large sets of data rather than leverage the computing resources of a specific infrastructure. Since the average mammogram image is 30MB in size and each patient session results in eight images, the sheer volume of information collected demands a specialized support infrastructure like a data grid. Additionally, while the purpose of eDiamond is similar to the work being done at National Digital Mammography Archive based at the University of Pennsylvania, there are critical differences. The Mirada software tools for standardizing mammogram images can be used for creating digital images from film-based mammograms, allowing patients' archival records to be included in the eDiamond database. Also, the IBM/Oxford grid is based on off-the-shelf solutions rather than the highly customized technologies that typify most grids.

Could eDiamond potentially enhance the way patients, physicians, and researchers benefit from mammography data? We believe so. The ability to include archival mammogram images offers doctors a

centralized methodology for spotting potential or tracing developing cancers. Additionally, the inclusion of diagnosis and treatment information should enhance analysis of the effectiveness of specific drugs and therapies, and also provide a valuable teaching tool for medical students. Finally, if eDiamond expands to serve all ninety-two breast cancer screening facilities in the UK, and is connected with other similar programs, the resulting grid could provide the means for systematically tracking breast cancer trends across specific populations and geographies. Overall, we believe that eDiamond has the potential to both measurably improve the health and lives of the patients it will serve, and to help to drive grid as a useful, workable, affordable IT solution for real-world problems.

AOL to Treat Members Like Members (Not Customers)

By Jim Balderston

AOL has announced that it will no longer accept third party pop-up advertising or merchandise sales for the AOL service. The new policy will take effect when AOL has completed existing commitments to advertisers using pop-up ads. AOL CEO Jon Miller said that members should have a better experience as a result, and that the company would find ways to keep advertisers happy. AOL also announced that it is making it easier for members to find and change their marketing preferences and that opt-out lists will no longer expire on an annual basis. AOL did not indicate when they expected the backlog of third party pop-ups to be expended.

Pop-up advertisements have gone from the mildly irritating but ubiquitous X-10 camera phenomena to an overwhelming deluge that encompasses subscription offers, casino touts, online surveys, gadget promotions and all sorts of other pimping of electronic effluvia that fills one's browser window in much the same way junk mail fills the mailbox or spam crowds one's inbox. In fact, the spam analogy would appear to be right on the money here.

For people not using broadband and those plowing through the World Wide Web with a computer that was purchased in the last century, pop-up ads have become a noticeable drain on resources. Processors, memory, and bandwidth are all consumed while waiting for pop-up ads to clear out of the way and allow the desired page to finally display. In short, pop-up ads severely downgrade the Internet experience for many users. AOL, with its rafts of in-house promotions, is enough to challenge the most patient of users without third party flotsam clogging the access lines. Apparently (and shockingly) the AOL membership made their collective voice loud enough to be heard in the well insulated office of AOL executives. As a result, AOL apparently has decided that its membership was more valuable to the company as a relatively contented exclusive audience than as calves offered for slaughter to any company willing to pay an access toll. The change in attitude can be found, we believe, in the new pop-up policy as well as those governing the marketing preferences and opt-in lists. AOL may also be feeling the pressure from the changing needs of an ever-more sophisticated user base, which now — by means of ever more user-friendly software and ISP connection options — have alternatives for connecting to the Internet and the World Wide Web that suppress pop-up ads. No longer captive, this user base may in fact be seeking less cluttered pastures, ones in which they are allowed to graze (and browse) in relative peace and quiet.

Correcting a Significant Omission: XML 1.1 Moves to Candidate Recommendation

By Clay Ryder

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) this week released XML 1.1 as a candidate recommendation, the second to last phase in the W3C recommendation process. This revision of XML changes the treatment of Unicode, an increasingly global standard for representing characters. Amongst changes to Unicode support in XML 1.1 is one that will specifically address IBM mainframe users by fixing issues related to the end-of-line character, which is not properly processed in version 1.0. Some industry participants have complained that the new specifications would break XML's backwards-compatibility in order to benefit IBM, but the company maintains that this would not be the case given the flexibility of XML in describing the contents of documents and the W3C defended the proposed changes. The W3C's commentary period closes on February 14, 2003.

Discussion about standards, especially within industry consortia, can be often seem like ongoing grudge matches whereby the participants seek to improve their competitive position by codifying existing technological advantages. While there are those who would maintain that XML 1.1 has been bent to accommodate Big Blue's aspirations, we believe the reality is that an important class of computing citizens has been locked out of full participation in the benefit imbued by the use of XML, namely mainframe users. It is difficult to accept the notion of an internet-enabled cross platform technology such as XML limiting the participation of some of the most tried, tested, and true computer users, especially given their potential effect on the marketplace. With this candidate recommendation, it appears that this omission will be addressed.

While IBM is undoubtedly pleased with this W3C recommendation, ultimately we believe the significant user base of mainframe systems are the real winners. By being able to more fully participate in the realm of XML and Web Services, the myriad data housed in mainframe installations can be more easily leveraged within the enterprise along with more contemporary information solutions. Additionally, the concept and process of server consolidation on mainframes has another potential barrier excised as the mainframe computing paradigm continues its resurgence. Obviously, this announcement will have little direct impact on the SMB sector; however, its indirect affect may be felt as more information that has traditionally lived in the glass house finds yet another method by which to escape the historic castle of computing and emerge into the mainstream of Internet-based business processes.

Sun, HDS, IBM, Veritas Announce CIM Product Rollout

By Charles King

Sun Microsystems, HDS, IBM, and Veritas have announced plans to deliver Common Information Model (CIM), Web-Based Enterprise Management (WBEM), and Storage Management Initiative (SIM, formerly Bluefin) compliant storage area network (SAN)-based storage management products, and to support joint interoperability guidelines and testing. The four companies said that their joint effort is open to all storage vendors, and should be seen as a public demonstration of their commitment to deploy open storage networks. Participating companies would be expected to ship CIM/WBEM based storage management software commercially in 2003, support the emerging SMI specifications and CIM/WBEM interface endorsed by the Storage Networking Industry Association (SNIA), make their CIM Provider (SMI agents) available to others for testing, and conduct joint interoperability testing and qualifications. In separate announcements, HP said that it had declined the group's invitation but will continue to support the SNIA and to develop CIM/WBEM-based products. Storage vendor EMC, which sits on SNIA's CIM development committee, said that it had not been invited to join the effort.

While we are always heartened to see kids playing nicely together, we believe it advisable to disperse the fog of genial self-congratulation that permeates this announcement. For the uninitiated, CIM is a set of emerging, SNIA-endorsed SAN management application programming interfaces (APIs) that purports to be the lingua franca that will eventually enable true heterogeneous storage management (at least among CIM-compliant hardware and software). Good enough. It should also be noted that virtually every notable storage vendor is a member of SNIA, and that all have publicly stated their intention to create CIM-enabled products. Okay, so what does this announcement really mean? First, the effort's sponsors are stating publicly when they will produce commercial CIM-enabled products. For this we applaud them. Huzzah! But the fact that the storage industry's two biggest players (EMC and HP) are absent detracts from whatever value this effort might appear to offer. Additionally, sponsor's executives have taken the CIM announcement as an opportunity to demean the value of storage API swaps between individual vendors.

There are three dirty little secrets about CIM that we believe it is wise to remember. First, the glacial nature of industry standard evolution means that the deployment and adoption of standards is incremental and highly variable. Despite the CIM sponsors' attempt to present a united front, the extent of their individual efforts varies widely. Second, the true value of CIM-compliance depends entirely on the number of vendors involved. In other words, CIM-based tools will be largely worthless unless every box in a given heterogeneous

environment is CIM-enabled. Finally, two words: legacy compatibility. While a great deal of vendor effort and investment has gone into CIM and most are happy to promote upcoming CIM-based products, few have discussed just how far back they will extend CIM-compliance to their legacy systems. Though a few companies offer highly flexible methodologies for complex management tasks (EMC's Widesky includes universal translation middleware that allows EMC software to talk to hardware that uses interfaces including CLI, API, and CIM; and IBM's virtualization engine provides a single point of control for block level storage management) just how most vendors will extend CIM-based solutions' backward compatibility is still unknown. Until vendors are willing and able to publicize that particular roadmap, storage customers would do well to remember that for the time being, anyway, vendor API swaps will be far more important to their worlds than new CIM-compliant products.

NAI Offers Professional Services

By Jim Balderston

Network Associates announced this week that it would begin offering enterprises network and security consulting services and education. The company has brought together experts from its Sniffer Technologies and McAfee Security product lines and melded them into a single organization called Network Associates Expert Services with the charter of helping companies manage security and networks in a more holistic fashion. The company will offer three separate expert services; network, security, and education. Network services will focus on networks assessment and design, product deployment, and network downtime emergency response. Security expert services will target security design and management, assessments of existing security deployments, and emergency response to security breaches. The expert education service will provide ongoing, hands-on training in the areas listed above.

Network Associates has rightly recognized what we see as a solid, irrefutable reality: that of the convergence of network technology and security technology into a comprehensive and seamless whole. While not the first company to notice this trend, the fact the company is moving with the flow in this regard bodes well for the future of the company and its fortunes.

Both networks and security technologies are becoming more complex as demands and threats escalate. And the increasing complexity of each area adds to complexity of the other. As network topologies grow ever more tangled, the complexity of the task of securing them also increases dramatically. As security technologies become more dispersed and granular, they add strain to the networks they are deployed upon. Designing and building secure networks no longer happens sequentially. Network first, and then security is a doomed design model. The company seems to have grasped this essential idea. We think the development of the service arm could also aid and abet the new Network Associates as it moves forward to hold and reclaim existing or past customers, as well as securing new ones. The old regime at Network Associates had a rather haughty attitude toward customers; the general consensus was that customers had but two choices, Network Associates or Symantec. With the new management team now clear of various financial misdoings of the previous gang, its new services operations could become a powerful conduit for customer feedback and design suggestions, something that will hopefully not fall on deaf ears.