
Market Roundup

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Keeping Pace with Complexity? Not Really

By Jim Balderston

Dell has announced three new server management tools as part of its OpenManage software offering. The company said OpenManage now will offer greater levels of integration in Windows IT deployments, with Dell Management Pack for Microsoft Operations Manager (MOM) which provides alerts concerning potential or actual hardware failures. Dell Update Packages with SMS will help automate the management and patching of server hardware, the company said. The third product, Dell Deployment Toolkit, will help customers deploy servers using Microsoft Automated Deployment Services (ADS). The company said the new offerings will give an IT administrator the ability to manage both Dell hardware and Microsoft software through the same screen, allowing for updates of servers' BIOS or firmware, or for applying security patches. Dell Management Pack and Dell Update Packages are available now; the Dell Deployment Toolkit will be available by the end of the year. All three offerings are free.

One suspects that for the IT managers deploying Windows servers as the core of their IT footprint, this is potentially good news. Given the fact that the complexity of IT deployments even at the low end of the enterprise food chain is skyrocketing, tools that help automate — or partially automate — basic functions of server management and updates must be welcomed with some level of IT gratitude. With data generation, storage, and access levels doubling on an annual basis, and with IT deployments becoming ever more critical to enterprises of all sizes, the ability to ease the IT managers' day-to-day, hands-on burden can be a significant means for cost reduction and greater IT reliability.

That said, one has to look at this offering from Dell and note that it is not applicable for anything beyond the Windows-based SMB, with an emphasis on the lower end of that market ecosphere. While these tools will in all probability help the managers of Windows-based environments, these tools pale in comparison with the real IT management offerings well established in the market by companies like IBM, HP, Sun, and others. In short, with market demands for easing complexity reaching a near mob-like intensity, Dell had to do something and this is apparently the company's response to market demands. Is it enough? We don't think so, not in its present form. Managing server BIOS configurations is a nice tool, but one that addresses only the smallest percentage of IT infrastructure management needs. With companies like IBM making company-wide forays into the SMB markets, notably in the mid-tier with an array of vastly more sophisticated IT management products and tools than Dell's present portfolio, we see this move as not only defensive of what Dell sees as its home turf, but largely the stuff of press releases and little more. The demands of taming IT complexity in the SMB will continue to skyrocket in the coming years; the question for vendors like Dell is simple: Can they keep pace? In our minds, based on this offering, the answer is distinctly, "No."

HP's Announces IT Service Management Offerings

By Charles King

HP has announced more than forty new services and software products designed to advance the company's Adaptive Enterprise initiative. According to HP, the new offerings will help customers integrate heterogeneous technologies, reduce operations costs, and automate IT responses to real-time business demands. Many of the new offerings focus on HP's IT Services Management (ITSM) model, which is based on IT Information Library standards, and include ITSM Certification for Service Partners, ITSM Best Practices for HP OpenView Service Desk, and a project between HP and SAP that intends to leverage ITSM with SAP's adaptive business service strategy. In addition, HP introduced new IT management software products including the HP Systems Insight Manager which offers unified management of HP's Proliant, Integrity, and HP9000 servers, and accommodates plug-ins for client, storage, printer, and power management. Other software offerings include HP OpenView Management Integration Platform, HP OpenView Select Access, HP OpenView Operations and HP Web Jetadmin 7.5. According to HP, the new software products provide the means for cross-platform management of UNIX-, Linux-, and Windows-based devices from a single console; pre-configured processes for IT service management; and a management platform for Web services. No pricing or availability information was included in the announcement.

To date, the story of HP's Adaptive Enterprise initiative has read a bit like a bad Russian novel, with uncertain promises of romance and intrigue, gratuitous action when the going gets slow, a large cast of incomprehensible characters spouting unbelievable dialogue, and an all-too-uncertain conclusion. At a time when the entire IT industry is talking about the need to simplify and automate IT processes while at the same time integrating them more fully with business processes, HP can not seem to articulate exactly what Adaptive Enterprise is supposed to be. From the looks of this announcement, the company has decided to forget visionary messaging and simply define Adaptive Enterprise as the sum of its ITSM and OpenView parts. There is some wisdom in following this path. On the sunny side, these new offerings deliver functions that will be of particular interest to existing HP customers, who, after all, are the folks HP needs to please in the first place. Single console management of multiple hardware and OS platforms strikes to the heart of enterprise IT complexity, addresses the needs of enterprises that are happily deploying scads of rack-mounted Pentium and Xeon servers, and dovetails nicely with HP's long term strategy of driving its customers to an all-Intel future.

Good enough, but the question that this announcement fails to answer rhetorically or in its content is whether all this successfully clarifies the so far indefinable Adaptive Enterprise. Historically, HP has been pretty good at creating enterprise solutions that quicken the blood of datacenter geeks, but the company has been less successful at explaining the big picture benefits of its offerings in ways non-geek executives and customers of other vendors can get excited about. The new ITSM and OpenView solutions are cases in point; cool stuff that makes life easier for IT managers and staff in companies that use HP products, but whose business value to other workers, teams, organizations, and non-HP customers is harder to define. The toughest lesson of the dotcom bust for vendors was that enterprise customers are no longer willing to buy IT for the sake of IT. HP's new offerings offer users some interesting, even powerful alternatives for managing IT infrastructures, but how well this will fly outside the sphere of HP's influence without a compelling, believable strategic vision remains to be seen.

Red Hat Walks Fine Line between Corporate Player and Open Source Innovator

By Tracy Corbo

Red Hat has announced the release of the Fedora Project, Fedora Core 1. The Fedora Project is a Red Hat-sponsored and community-supported open source project that promotes development of open source software through a collaborative, community effort. Built for and with the help of the open source community, the Fedora Project is for developers and early high-tech enthusiasts using Linux in non-critical computing environments.

Fedora Core 1 provides a complete Linux platform built exclusively from open source software. The release is available at no cost and is targeted at developers, testers, and other technology enthusiasts who wish to participate in the development process.

Red Hat is in the difficult position of appeasing two masters: the corporate IT directors and the open source community of developers and innovators. The announcement of the Fedora Project is an important step for Red Hat as it grows up and takes on more responsibility as a corporate citizen. It marks a clean delineation between the code in the Enterprise Edition and the open source communities free wheeling innovation. However, it does not mean that Red Hat is abandoning open source. As long as it continues to operate along the guidelines of the open source initiative, contributing to and drawing from certified code base, Red Hat is still playing fair, at least as far as open source is concerned. If, however, they cut themselves off from the open source community completely, then it would be a cause for concern. For now, this does not appear to be the case.

The Fedora announcement coincided with Red Hat's decision to discontinue support of its "free" consumer Linux products, which is in line with its shift towards a 100% corporate focus. However, Red Hat failed to do a good job clearly communicating all of this upfront, and the developer community's initial response was to cry foul. In an effort to stem the tide of negative response, Red Hat has since posted a much needed positioning message on their Web site. To be fair, the open source community has cause to be a bit touchy. This announcement is hot on the heels of Novell's acquisition of SUSE Linux and how well Novell handles this acquisition will truly be a test of how well a commercially focused enterprise can handle the seemingly contradictory tasks of managing corporate needs while maintaining a balance with open source ethos.



HP Drags Its Feet on HP-UX and Alpha

By Joyce Tompsett Becknell

HP recently published a letter from Rich Marcello, SVP and GM of Business Critical Server Products line, to its customers, that explains delays in rolling out new versions of its HP-UX and Alpha products. The release of HP-UX 11i v.3 will be delayed by at least half a year, from the end of 2004 until the end of the first half of 2005. In addition, HP is not happy with the results of the Alpha EV79 chip from a performance or time-to-market angle, and they have chosen to halt development on the chip. Instead they will add performance boosters to the EV7z, giving it a 14-16% performance boost. At the same time, the letter continues to boast of HP's achievements with its Integrity Server line, computers designed to use the Intel IA-64 chip.

The negative issues, while couched in positive terms, are not insignificant. Among other bits of technology being delayed (they have been promised for 11i v.3) are vPars dynamic partitioning functionality; TruCluster Server Single System Image, which brings the well-respected Tru64 cluster technology to HP-UX; and the Advanced File System (AdvFS). HP continues to promise that these technology milestones have been consistent over time and that goals will continue to be met. It's just going to take more time, and therein lies the rub. HP has one of the world's largest and most loyal installed bases. This is not just the legacy of 32-bit Intel servers that they inherited from Compaq in addition to their own customers. More importantly, this is about the legions of loyal PA-RISC/HP-UX and Alpha/Tru64 customers who have stood by their UNIX because it met their needs and because HP or Compaq took good care of them. Since the merger, however, it has become increasingly clear that the HP Enterprise business is not what it once was. It continues to be the loss-leading segment of HP's business, and it is being forced ever more quickly into the very green and very inexperienced IA-64 architecture while continuing to lose significant technology talent as HP continues its "shrink to profitability" drumbeat. In our mind, a large customer base on a mature, award-winning group of products designed for business-critical computing is being neglected or herded to a relatively unknown set of products as the CEO continues to focus on shareholders at the expense of the customer base.

HP Customers are not idiots. They understand the risks involved in changing architectures. One does not simply pull a stable architecture out from under a mission-critical application without proving that the move results in a significantly better environment or has real business value. The Linux community is a good example of this. Users have not moved their applications from their indigenous OS to a new, less mature one

overnight, nor has any company forced them to do this. HP, on the other hand, is increasing the pressure to stay with an architecture that will be supported but futureless, or join them in the bet that IA-64 can catch up and surpass the other mature, stable 64-bit architectures out there. This is leading more and more HP customers to rethink their position, although they aren't leaping like lemmings off the side of the cliff just yet. However, it does take about the same amount of effort and risk to make the IA-64 leap as it does to move to one of the other industry leaders. There is nothing wrong with the HP products. There is nothing wrong with the roadmaps that HP product managers and engineers have devised, as long as they stick to them. The problem lies with senior management and where it sees fit to put its investments, time, and interest. If HP is truly committed to the enterprise line then it should prove that by bringing products out on time and spending the resources to make that happen. If HP is not serious about its enterprise products, then it should sell that business to someone who is. Otherwise, IBM and Sun have hungry sales people and clever marketing teams with mature, stable UNIX and 64-bit products waiting just around the corner who will be happy to give customers a new home.