
Market Roundup

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HP and Cisco Join Together for Pervasive WLAN

By Joyce Tompsett Becknell

This week HP and Cisco announced a joint effort to bring applications and services based on Cisco's Pervasive Indoor Wireless technology to enterprise customers. Cisco announced many of the core services in its Unified Wireless Network Solution family in June, and the new applications and services include security, guest access, voice-over WiFi, and location-based services. HP and Cisco envision customers using these capabilities for applications such as IT asset tracking, presence-based applications, dual-mode voice, and integrated intrusion detection and prevention. The companies expect enterprise customers to find improved operation efficiencies and reduced costs for wireless network services. Cisco will address WLAN security, deployment, management, and control issues. HP Services will build upon the Cisco platform and provide design, systems integration, and management services as well as support for the new solutions. Cisco believes that a significant step in this solution was the introduction of products that work with its Light Weight Access Point Protocol (LWAPP), a management protocol that allows intelligence for a wireless network to be located centrally. Cisco believes that by moving the intelligence to a centralized controller, configuration time for an access point can be significantly reduced. HP Services will be able to take advantage of LWAPP to provide faster deployment and expansion, as well as simplified management.

The evolution of wireless networks has resembled the earlier evolution of LANs in the enterprise. At first they were either designed for small groups and then later expanded to include everyone, or they were designed for specific applications, such as shared printers or files. This soon expanded as the technology became pervasive until today when it is hard to find an enterprise without a network. Wireless networking is not yet pervasive, but the range of capabilities and applications possible with wireless networks is growing as the underlying components are maturing and hardening around security and standards. HP is one of the first major integrators to develop a practice around pervasive WLAN and Cisco is a natural choice as it owns the lion's share of corporate networking revenue and is heavily investing in its WLAN capabilities. Although HP owns ProCurve, who also provides network equipment, like most professional services businesses HP tries to provide multiple vendors' products in order to remain neutral for its customers.

Cisco meanwhile is facing some of the same issues in networking that its partners are facing with systems and storage. As many components become commoditized, there is less and less value in providing hardware, and leading-edge design provides a shorter and shorter first-mover market advantage. Instead, software, services, and solutions are the three magic words. Making routers is not the important bit, but providing the solutions comprised of the applications and services that make next generation networks valuable to enterprise customers is what it takes to be the strategic partner to enterprises. Additionally, both HP and Cisco have managed to credibly introduce management into the discussion. Many of the issues facing network managers—again like those facing systems managers—revolve around managing the various entities on the network. HP's OpenView is another product the two companies are hoping to bring into the solution to help make managing simpler, and to provide HP another leg up in the management battle. HP and Cisco customers who want to investigate pervasive wireless networking in their environment have an opportunity to be one of the pioneers of next-generation projects. Finally, HP can regain some exposure in this space and build its professional services in a sensible direction at the same time. We look forward to hearing about projects in this space.

BMC Introduces Agentless Scheduling

By *Tony Lock*

This week BMC announced the release of the latest version of CONTROL-M, its widely deployed enterprise job scheduling software. The new software will provide agentless enterprise scheduling capabilities, thereby potentially allowing systems that were previously inaccessible to enjoy effective job scheduling for the first time. The latest version of BMC CONTROL-M Enterprise Manager will provide capabilities to place almost the entire spectrum of the IT infrastructure under direct control and measurement. The facilities supplied will allow jobs to be scheduled, submitted, and monitored on a very wide range of enterprise platforms without the need to install a remote agent. Such a capability should permit systems previously deemed inaccessible due to security protocols, configuration processes, or environmental resources to be brought into mainstream management and monitoring operations. It is expected that the CONTROL-M Enterprise Manager software, the solution with the infrastructure in place to be ready for agentless CONTROL-M, will be made generally available in September 2006.

Job scheduling is one of those areas of IT that is almost invisible to the enterprise as a whole but which has always been incredibly important. Its importance will only increase as organizations seek to utilize their IT systems in the most effective and business-efficient means possible. The fact that IBM/Tivoli and CA along with BMC have all made recent announcements in this space provides a fair indication that this is an area of more than a little import. There is no doubt that the volume and complexity of workload automation continues to rise. As composite applications and new business processes continue to flourish and require increasingly complex composite transactions to be undertaken, it is estimated that many organizations have more than half of their business-critical operations performed in batch and other “job scheduled” environments. It is clear that effective and efficient job scheduling is not simply “nice to have”; it is essential.

BMC sees the business benefits deliverable via its CONTROL-M offering as falling into a number of areas. These include the ability to employ agentless data management across both mainframe and distributed systems thereby providing accurate, real-time knowledge of business operations and processes supported by IT. It almost goes without saying that the management facilities supplied also permit reductions to be made in manual IT processes allowing resources to be redeployed and to allow efficient business problem detection and resolution to be undertaken. However, the advantages deliverable through the use of an agentless approach will be felt particularly by organizations faced with external regulatory or compliance directives. It is not unusual for such directives to place a non-trivial burden on IT managers to obtain security clearance for any monitoring and management tools utilized on platforms servicing regulated systems. The use of an agentless approach that requires no additional software to be loaded may free IT and business resources while speeding operations.

BMC is steadily adding significant capabilities to its long-established systems management capabilities and has made great steps forward as it too promotes the alignment of IT resource consumption with business-driven requirements. This latest step is innovative and will likely be welcomed by many potential customers. The challenge for BMC is not in its technology but in effectively communicating its developing systems and service management capabilities to its established and potential new customers. It must also work well with its large partner community.

A Wiki for Patents?

By *Clay Ryder*

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has released the draft of its five-year strategic plan designed to foster American innovation and competitiveness at home and around the globe. The draft is soliciting public comment—including suggestions, questions, and other input—regarding optimizing the quality and timeliness of the patent and trademark review process that will guide the agency from 2007-2012. The Office indicated that it would be publishing the final plan in early 2007. Included in the proposed plan is a peer review mechanism that would encourage outside participants to provide feedback on patent applications, in part to help lessen the burden on the Office staff. Separately, a patent attorney and accountant announced the launch of wikipatents.com, a patent-rating site with more than 3 million patent listings that in part seeks to help patent examiners, attorneys, litigants,

inventors, and other interested third parties decide whether existing patents deserve patent protection. In addition, the site plans to garner feedback on pending patent applications in the future. Current features of the site include searching by patent number, reading/writing a patent's description in laypersons' terms, rating a patent's technical accuracy, voting on a reasonable royalty value, and providing licensing information and/or availability. In addition, site users can list prior pieces of art, i.e., previously available public information related to a present invention, such as academic literature and other published patents, which they feel are relevant to assessing the patent in question.

Last January we discussed the Open Source Software as Prior Art project that OSDL, IBM, Novell, Red Hat, and VA Software's SourceForge.net were undertaking, as well as the Open Patent Review and the Patent Quality Index. This announcement from wikipatents.com and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office further illustrates the growing recognition in the marketplace that the patent system has become overloaded and is being abused in the process. In today's reality the patent process has become burdened by an onslaught of new innovations, some mired in deep technological black magic, some contested, and some flat-out silly. Patent examiners, and the economy as whole, need new tools to assist in providing the valuable service of patent registration and examination. Wikipatents.com is another example of interested third parties seeking to rise to the occasion of patent process improvement by offering a discussion point to aggregate comments and supporting documentation regarding current patents. In some respects this may be duplicative to some of the Open Source Software as Prior Art efforts, however, wikipatents.com is not limited to a discussion of open source prior art, but rather the much broader scope of patents in general.

Wikipatents.com looks to offer contributors a star-based rating scheme, a la restaurant or hotel reviews, as part of their commentary. While such a visual representation can be helpful in quickly gleaning relevant information, it does not in and of itself come near the depth of technical review warranted in the patent-granting process. When recognized as prior art, patents descendent from innovation developed on top of existing patents can be clearly delineated from the works that have already been created. To us, the more eyes there are out there viewing patents the better, as this could aid in the patent examination process, with substantial amounts of information aggregated and roughly reviewed prior to the patent examiner's initial investigation into a proposed patent. Just as with the open source or other similar communities of interest, encouraging the broader community to comment on the patent process could assist examiners when it comes to deeply technical or mind-numbing abstractions, and thus help move the process along.

While we not sure how wikipatents.com commentaries might mesh with the results of The Patent Quality Index for example, or at what point information gathering initiatives would become duplicative, or worse, competitive, right now we believe raising the awareness of patent quality issues is paramount. To our way of thinking, the higher the awareness, the higher the participation by the community at large, the higher the likelihood of patent process reform, and thus the higher overall value of the patents themselves. We are quite pleased to see continued interest in improving the patent process and the process being championed by new communities. we shall keep a keen eye on this exciting, and very important space.

Amazon Joins the Server Network

By *Susan Dietz*

Amazon recently announced its intention to offer computing power on demand over the Internet. This service is now in beta testing and is targeted at software developers writing Web applications. It is called Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2), and is being offered at \$0.10 (yes, one thin dime) per instance hour consumed. Each instance hour provides the equivalent processing power of a 1.7 GHz Xeon-based server with 1.75GB RAM, 160GB of storage, and 250MBps of network bandwidth. Of course, bandwidth and storage are both separate costs. EC2 is designed to work with Amazon's Simple Storage Service (S3), which was introduced by Amazon earlier this year. EC2 is scalable, and the user is only billed for what is used. This is the latest offering in Amazon's recent push into the web services arena, following services developed for messaging, search, ecommerce, and the recently developed S3.

Essentially, with this announcement Amazon has decided to become a provider of computing services on demand for software developers. This means that software developers do not need to purchase their own servers and thus purchase the attendant support issues. Purchasing only what is needed from Amazon could allow developers to worry about their real business: writing cool software. However, Amazon, like any retail business, suffers from seasonal highs and lows. Would its extra server capacity that is available in, say, April also be available in the middle of the December Christmas rush? We don't believe that this is going to turn into an entirely new business model for Amazon, replacing its über-successful online marketplace. Rather, this seems to us a way for savvy businesspeople to make the most of their assets. Have extra server capacity? Sell it, cover some sunk cost, and maybe generate some profit. If this new venture does become a significant business for Amazon, would it think about changing its business model? Perhaps it would make sense for Amazon to charge different rates at different times of the year, or even different times of the day. On the speculative side, if this idea catches on, maybe eBay will start auctioning off its extra server time. If the two Internet retail giants start muscling in on the server-for-hire business, what might this mean for other service providers as well as the system vendors Sun, HP, IBM, Microsoft, et al?

One thing that may give Amazon an edge over other companies, besides its low price point, is its better-than-average customer service. Part of Amazon's success story lies in the realization that customers are in charge of its revenue, so Amazon generally treats its customers very well. With most other companies, the customer service can be a spotty, binary experience: it is either on or off, and with some, it is mostly off. Better customer service, in addition to lower price points, may just put Amazon on the map of the software designer's possible options for extra computing power, despite the fact that Amazon isn't generally what one thinks of first. But, diversification is healthy, or so they say in Business 101. And we have to admit, Amazon has definitely mastered the basics of running a successful business.