
Market Roundup

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Microsoft Greets New Vistas

By Joyce Tompsett Becknell

At long last, with great fanfare, Microsoft has launched the consumer version of Vista. Where does one begin? Hundreds of pages have already been dedicated to the analysis of this new operating system. Some users have been working with various builds of this product for years. Microsoft speaks proudly of the thousands of staff who have contributed to the making of this operating system, which Microsoft claims is its most significant OS thus far. Hyperbole aside, Microsoft has worked hard to make a product that is more secure, easier to use, capable of doing more, and changing how many of us use our computers on a daily basis. Power users and Windows lovers around the world rushed to get their copies so they could install and see for themselves what the product is and how it works on their systems. Understandably corporate users (who received their launch in late 2006) were less excited at their launch, but the millions of small businesses and consumers around the world really are the lifeblood of Windows, and pleasing them is one of Microsoft's primary missions.

Of course the issue is not whether or not to adopt Vista. Most of us will eventually upgrade or we'll purchase a new PC with the OS pre-installed. The real issue is one of timing; that is, when will we take the plunge? Microsoft of course would like you to start now, or in the very near future. However, most of us aren't quite ready. Some are worried about performance and compatibility. Microsoft claims that the majority of drivers and applications should be ready now. There is even a tool, the Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor, that you can download to see how ready your system really is. Most people will do a double boot of XP and Vista, so if there are any problems they can use the other OS, so that should ease some fears. The interfaces look different, but many of them can be tweaked to recreate familiarity and features can be turned on or off at the individual's own pace. Some fear security issues. Microsoft claims that this is the most secure operating system it has ever built. And while we believe that the Redmond crew has learned many lessons about OS security in the Internet era, this is a new product, and acknowledgement of security is earned through testing and proof. The real measure of the security of this OS will come with the passage of time. The good news is that in the course of its lifecycle, it should never be more vulnerable than it is at launch: all future changes will be improvements and it is certainly true that Microsoft has really kept security at the forefront of its intentions.

Another concern users have is DRM and technical capabilities Microsoft has instituted concerning playback of high-density media. Not many are actually using HD technology on the desktop yet, but until there is a better understanding of how Microsoft's measures affect real-world user experiences, some people will be unwilling to upgrade to Vista. Microsoft has described Vista as different from and better than XP. Some users hesitate because of this difference, being unwilling or unable to take the time to learn a new OS, and some refuse not on the grounds that it may be different but rather because they don't believe it truly is better. Some fear that their equipment is not ready for Vista and others hesitate until the perfect system comes to market from their preferred hardware vendor.

In the end, Vista is a complicated product. It serves many functions, some new and some improved. It does some things brilliantly—genuinely living up to Microsoft's proclaimed Wow—but we'll quickly find the permutations

and combinations that result in a very different sort of wow and much cursing of software vendors and their kin. While Microsoft will encourage us all to upgrade sooner rather than later—and eventually it will be in our best interest to do so—each customer is going to have to do the work of figuring out when is appropriate for them. This is certainly not the worst product Microsoft has ever released despite what some disillusioned users argue, and while it may be the best they've done so far, it will continue to be improved upon. We encourage users to explore, have fun, but relax. Resist both the hype and the warnings of certain doom.

Symantec Secures Altiris for \$830 Million

By *Tony Lock*

This week Symantec Corporation announced that it has reached a definitive agreement to acquire Altiris Inc. The acquisition, which is subject to all of the usual closing conditions, is expected to close in the second calendar quarter of this year with Symantec paying \$33 in cash for each share of Altiris common stock, thereby valuing Altiris at approximately \$830 million, net-of-cash-acquired.

When this acquisition closes Symantec will be a remarkably different organization to that of only two years ago. During this time, Symantec has built on the original security technologies for which it has been very well known for many years to build and acquire a very broad range of solutions designed to assist businesses to secure and protect their endpoints. The addition of the Altiris solutions holds the potential to nicely complement the existing security, compliance, and—courtesy of the earlier acquisition of VERITAS—backup and recovery solutions for most computing and storage platforms.

Altiris will add different and valuable capabilities to the portfolio. The core discovery, asset management, and device configuration solutions supplied by Altiris help companies manage their endpoints effectively and to administer the configuration of those assets in line with business requirements. Symantec's existing security, compliance, and storage management solutions operate well, but to be effective the organization must ensure that all of its IT assets are properly configured and secured; the technologies delivered by Altiris supply the required capabilities to address this fundamental matter.

Like the VERITAS acquisition before it, the purchase of Altiris by Symantec holds great potential. However, to release this potential Symantec will need to address several key issues. Asset Management and end-point configuration management solutions, for all of their undoubted ability to help organizations operate IT assets efficiently and cost-effectively, are notoriously complex to sell. Symantec and its channel partners will need to expend considerable time and effort understanding the many values that Asset Management and configuration management tools can deliver. If the acquisition of Altiris is to succeed the underlying nature of Symantec as an organization will need to change, taking on much more of an “enterprise systems management” flavor than it has heretofore enjoyed. It will also place Symantec more firmly as a genuine competitor in the systems management marketplace, a testing environment. There is clear potential here; we shall watch with interest to see how Symantec takes its new portfolio to market and to note how the other players respond.

Optimal Security: A Mix of Hardware and Software

By *Lawrence D. Dietz*

Mistletoe Technologies, Inc., developer of a complete security system-on-a-chip (SoC) featuring VPN, firewall, and denial-of-service prevention applications in silicon, announced an agreement with Kaspersky Lab, a developer of secure content management solutions headquartered in Moscow, Russia. The collaboration is part of Mistletoe Technologies' ongoing effort to integrate best-in-class software that will enable system manufacturers to increase unified threat management (UTM) performance and network security, while reducing system development time and expense. Combining various features such as antivirus, URL filtering, and anti-spam, UTM products can provide a holistic and economical approach to security that may be well suited for SMBs. Mistletoe Technologies appears to be the first security silicon architecture to enable UTM features without sacrificing VPN and firewall performance. Historically, with general purpose processors, security system performance was sacrificed to

accommodate UTM features; this served as a deterrent to end users seeking to fully or reliably activate these features.

Kaspersky Lab's antivirus technology combines reactive, signature-based antivirus defense methods with proactive technologies to provide protection against viruses, spyware, crimeware, and other malware. Used in conjunction with Mistletoe Technologies' reference designs, this combination will likely provide improved services, support, and simplified network setup and management.

Security professionals have found that security needs to be built into the IT infrastructure in order to provide optimal protection with minimal negative impact on throughput. Security products that are in the direct data stream often come in for the closest scrutiny, and while this week is Vista's launch with the attendant press and analyst coverage, Sageza believes that progress in integrating hardware and software to provide complementary, multi-function security is worthy of recognition.

IT management of large organizations has often preferred a hardware platform over software especially in locations where there is a lack of technical support personnel. SMBs tend to seek the most cost-effective solution. We believe that the marriage of hardware and software for security purposes is one that could be very beneficial for users. However, it can be a long journey from design to successful implementation with a low TCO. We applaud the efforts of Kaspersky and Mistletoe and look forward to other new developments that help to adapt the security platform to the needs of IT organizations of all sizes.

APC Extends InfraStruXure InRow Cooling Solutions

By Clay Ryder

American Power Conversion (APC) has announced the availability of InfraStruXure InRow RP, its new cooling unit for data centers and small computer rooms. The InfraStruXure InRow RP places cooling next to the heat source, providing predictable, dynamic heat removal for medium, high, and ultra-high density deployments. The InRow RP is the latest in the suite of InfraStruXure InRow cooling units that can support power densities of up to 70 kW in a chilled water configuration or up to 37 kW per rack in a refrigerant-based design. The variable airflow architecture lowers operating costs by reducing energy consumption during partial load conditions. An integrated humidifier provides room-level moisture control to minimize static electric discharge as well as a dedicated dehumidification cycle and standard reheat coil to prevent overcooling during dehumidification. The cooling architecture supports the addition of hot aisle or rack air containment, which improves predictability and isolates rack deployments, to allowing high-density installations in data centers with traditional cooling architectures. A control algorithm enables real-time capacity monitoring to facilitate planning of new IT deployments. In addition, the company noted that its InfraStruXure Designer tool for planning data centers now includes support for the InRow RP and features a new three-dimensional view that shows a data center from all angles and switches seamlessly between the floor, rack, and 3D view at any time. The InfraStruXure InRow RP is currently available in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. It will be available in Asia Pacific at the end of March. No pricing information was disclosed.

As we have stated before, we believe one of the hot topics of 2007 will be cooling in the data center. This latest announcement from APC illustrates how the company continues transforming itself from a seller of heavy batteries-in-a-box that go under the desk to a more strategically focused data-center facilities provider. The overlap in the data center between the former fiefdoms of facilities and IT continues; we are witnessing a shift where environmental equipment is increasingly focused on software and realtime control, not just brute-force cooling tonnage. The limitations of the physical plant as well as budgetary considerations have become an overriding concern for many an organization. No longer do organizations have the luxury of finding the prime location for a new piece of equipment on the raised floor; rather, the space available is the space available. In this scenario, cooling solutions must be able to account for sub-prime floor placement while still delivering a cost-effective solution.

Through the use InfraStruXure InRow RP, organizations are afforded the flexibility of being able to place equipment in the available space knowing that the cooling can be brought alongside. However, perhaps even more

important is the availability of InfraStruXure Designer tool that can help the organization identify cooling issues prior to the deployment of new equipment. By being able to consider the management of cooling, i.e., the power-in and power-out profile of the datacenter and the resulting heat concentration and dissipation needs, organizations can know in advance whether a proposed footprint will be viable given the cooling infrastructure. This is much better than the historic guesstimate approach that ultimately falls back on cranking down the data center thermostat to compensate for reality while handily emptying the data center power budget.

Increased efficiency in any operation is a relatively simple way to improve the bottom line and forestall the need for capital investment. By closely aligning power consumption, heat generation, cooling, and physical space inside the data center, organizations can not only save ongoing costs but also recoup more of an existing investment. We are pleased to see that APC is among the select few that see the opportunity in improving data center operations. For APC in particular, this approach allows the company to continue its shift from being a tactical supplier of backup batteries and other solutions to becoming a strategic partner to business, with all the ancillary benefits accrued. Not that many years ago, liquid cooling was assumed as dead as the mainframe from which it was derived. Today, cooling is more important than ever, whether the equipment is a server rack, storage array, blade server, or even a mainframe. By earning a place in the early discussions of data center build outs, APC may do more than cool the data center, and even generate some additional cash for its coffers, which is cool by most any account.