Market Roundup

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Sun and Microsoft Expand Strategic Alliance

By Clay Ryder

Microsoft Corporation and Sun Microsystems have announced that Sun has become a Windows Server OEM and that the two companies will collaborate to enable further deployment of Windows Server on Sun x64 systems. Among the components of the announcement are a Windows Server OEM Agreement whereby Sun will offer Windows Server on its x64 hardware and will provide additional value-added software for systems carrying Windows Server; Microsoft and Sun will work together to test and validate the Windows platform for Sun x64 Systems and Storage for scale-up enterprise computing; and Sun and Microsoft will work together to ensure that Solaris runs well as a guest on Microsoft virtualization technologies and that Windows Server runs well as a guest on Sun's virtualization technologies. In addition, the companies will continue collaborating to advance the deployment of the Microsoft Mediaroom IPTV and multimedia platform on Sun servers and storage systems as well as collectively build an Interoperability Center on Microsoft's Redmond campus. The Center will include a demonstration area for Sun x64 systems, act as a working lab for Windows on Sun benchmarks and sales tools, and support customers running proofs-of-concept for projects focused on Windows on Sun x64 systems, including joint Sun/Microsoft solutions in areas such as database, email and messaging, virtualization, and Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) support in Sun Ray thin clients.

This continued investment in interoperability builds on the initial cooperation agreement between the two companies initiated in April 2004. Since then, Microsoft and Sun have collaborated on interoperability for Web services, identity management, thin clients, systems management, and Windows Server engineering. Sun offers Windows Server installation and staging services through its Customer Ready Systems program, providing support for customers with more advanced pre-integration and testing needs. The two companies have also created a basis for tighter interoperability between Java Platform Enterprise Edition (Java EE), the .NET Framework 3.0 and Windows Communication Foundation in Sun's Web services interoperability technologies (Project Tango). Sun is also a founding member of the Microsoft Interoperability Vendor Alliance and a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner. Windows Server 2003 will be available on Sun x64 systems within 90 days.

If Rip Van Winkle had fallen asleep in 1997 and awoken a decade later, would he recognize the marketplace he had left behind or would he be in a state of disbelief? The intellectual and competitive rift between the Redmond Giant and the Copernican Company has been legendary, and although at times the two were forced to play nice on the IT playground at the behest of their mutual customers, until recently there was no love lost between the two creative colossuses. A scant three years ago, things began to thaw as changes in the marketplace and upper management saw the two firms begin to realize that their petty bickering in many cases was not serving themselves and was especially distasteful to their customers. This announcement is just one of many in which the two companies have decided that the drought times of the early 21st century was sufficient reason for shifting gears and pursuing the "rising tide raises all ships" strategy.

Given Sun's penchant for x64 systems, considering its initial relationship with AMD and followed by the improved coziness with Intel, the lack of a strategic relationship with Microsoft was simply leaving too much of the market-place untouched. Yes, Sun is quite capable of delivering Solaris and supporting Linux on x64, but collectively these OS platforms do not amount to the lion's share of the opportunity, and for Sun to continue to not put itself in the

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middle of the Windows Server opportunity would be simply foolhardy. Sun's expertise in large-scale solutions is legendary, and while Microsoft continues to invest heavily in growing the capability of x86 environments, the combination of the two thought leaders should serve their collective customers well. Following on the IBM and Sun announcement of direct IBM support for Solaris on its System x machines (and we hope System p and i as well someday), this announcement illustrates that although Sun was quite content (and competent) to go it alone in the 1990s the company recognizes the changed marketplace and it is reinventing itself accordingly. One might quibble that this should have happened sooner, but the result is that it has, and to our way of thinking this is good news for customers and the marketplace overall.

DMTF Accepts New Format for Portable VMs

By Clay Ryder

The Distributed Management Task Force (DMTF) recently announced the acceptance of a draft specification submitted by leading virtualization companies that seeks to establish an industry-standard format for portable virtual machines. The specification envisions that virtual machines packaged in this format will be capable of installation on any virtualization platform supporting the standard and as a result would simplify interoperability, security, and virtual machine lifecycle management for virtual infrastructures. Companies collaborating on this specification include Dell, HP, IBM, Microsoft, VMware, and XenSource. By collaborating on the development of the OVF specification, the group aims to make it easier for IT organizations to pre-package and certify software packaged as VM templates for deployment in their virtualized infrastructure and to facilitate the secure distribution of pre-packaged virtual appliances by ISVs and virtual appliance vendors. The group's stated goal is to eliminate the need for IT managers to separately install, configure, and manage interdependencies between virtualized operating systems and applications, by enabling automated management of the VM lifecycle. The companies have collectively submitted the specification to the DMTF for development into an industry standard that can be promoted worldwide.

The proposed format, called the Open Virtual Machine Format (OVF), uses existing packaging tools to combine one or more virtual machines together with a standards-based XML wrapper, giving the virtualization platform a portable package containing all required installation and configuration parameters for the virtual machines. This allows any virtualization platform that implements the standard to correctly install and run the virtual machines. OVF specifies procedures and technologies to permit integrity checking of VMs to ensure that they have not been modified since the package was produced. This security enhancement seeks to alleviate concerns regarding adoption of virtual appliances produced by third parties. OVF also provides mechanisms that support license checking for the enclosed VMs, and allows an installed VM to acquire information about its host virtualization platform and run-time environment for localization and optimization. In addition, to supporting existing virtual hard disk formats, OVF is extensible to support future virtual hard disk formats whose specifications are openly available.

We find this announcement interesting as it is further evidence of the growing acceptance of virtualized environments and also an indication that the industry at large is taking seriously the need to provide for standardized, virtual-machine distribution mechanisms that can be easily managed while protecting the interests of both the VM distributor and its customers. For organizations that have embraced the consolidated virtualized approach to computing, the ability to continue scaling upward while supporting multiple disparate workloads is essential, but requires as much if not more agility in the management of resources. If left to a manual process, this management overhead can be a significant gating factor preventing organizations from fully benefiting from all that virtualization has to offer.

We do note the absence of Sun Microsystems from the list of industry stalwarts that are driving this proposed specification. With all the efforts that the Copernican Company invested in the x86 architecture, and its expertise in virtualization with Solaris and its own UltraSPARC platform, we are surprised to not see its name included in the roster of talent. However, being the standards -ocused company it positions itself as, we expect that over time we shall see its endorsement as well. Overall, we are pleased that to see the continued focus on making virtual environments as rich as the physical ones and that many of the major players are taking the efforts to ensure user trust in distributed VMs while seeking to make the deployment and management of said environments as easy and straightforward as possible.

nCircle Helps Feds Meet OMB Mandates for Configuration Compliance

By Lawrence D. Dietz

nCircle, a provider of agentless security risk and compliance management solutions, has announced the availability of new Federal policy capabilities in the nCircle Configuration Compliance Manager product to assist organizations in complying with the OMB directive M-07-11. nCircle offers enterprise-wide automated assessments of the configuration of Windows XP devices against the Federal Desktop Core Configuration and FISMA policies, a requirement for all agencies by the OMB-mandated date of February 1, 2008. nCircle Configuration Compliance Manager can measure and report on configuration compliance and configuration changes across all networked devices, including servers, desktops, and network infrastructure components, providing visibility into system configurations and the compliance impact of changes with an agentless solution. The configuration information—which can be grouped and analyzed by agency, department, geography, or any other characteristic—compares actual configurations with established benchmarks and baselines, and provides customizable reporting for monitoring and regulatory purposes.

This capability is now available and will assist organizations in complying with the directive of meeting these configurations by February 1, 2008. These new Federal policies are available "out of the box" and augment nCircle's existing library of policy frameworks from CIS and NIST and compliance regulations like HIPAA and SOX. The nCircle policy library can be readily customized or adapted to audit against internal policies or best-practice policies in a cost-efficient manner. The solution is appliance-based and easy to deploy across the largest of organizations.

The most fundamental marketing messages in IT have always been: make money, save money, help meeting government compliance mandates. Unlike the squishy SOX regulation which has yet to have a newsworthy prosecution, mandates by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget impact buying decisions every day. Countless government employees are always looking for the easy way to check (or tick for my UK friends) the requirements box of any regulation.

Reporting on your success to your boss is also a sound marketing message. It would appear that the reporting flexibility of the Compliance Manager would help agencies and bureaus inventory their success and earmark recalcitrant systems for updates and budget allocations. It is also noteworthy that the software is agentless which we believe is preferable in most cases.

eIQnetworks Seeks Status Industry Acceptance

By Lawrence D. Dietz

eIQnetworks, Inc. has announced Open Log Format, the industry's first open source event-logging standard. Unlike proprietary standards, the multi vendor-supported OLF promotes interoperability that enables organizations to more easily manage and understand the log data collected from network devices, systems, and applications. OLF does not require certification and is available for any vendor or organization to adopt at no cost. A number of vendors including Astaro, Clavister, Cyberoam, iPolicy Networks, Secure Computing, and Top Layer Networks have pledged support for the OLF standard. OLF is available for immediate download at http://www.openlogformat.org.

OLF provides a fully extensible open source event-logging standard across all devices, systems, and applications that vendors can adopt to support logging requirements. Vendors and end users can also add additional log details to showcase specific solution functionality. eIQnetworks promotes the ability of OLF to alleviate concerns around log-format compatibility with existing SIM technologies, and obviate the need to create custom connectors to integrate and interpret vendor-specific logs, as is the case with proprietary log formats.

Evolving security challenges coupled with compliance and regulatory mandates have made it essential for organizations to collect, monitor, and analyze log data across the enterprise. Unfortunately each device, system, and application uses a unique and proprietary format, making it almost impossible to decipher log data. OLF offers the industry an alternative that eases the log collection and management process. Event logging is essentially the plumbing of Security Information Management. A Holy Grail of sorts has always been the ability to

perform correlation analysis across the variety of sensors and devices that accumulate log data. Larger software vendors in particular have tried to implement management suites that help to make sense of the mounds and mounds of data that is thrown off by security devices in particular. Analysis of complex, heterogeneous data is a nightmare and we are a strong believer in the need for standardization of event data to facilitate analysis and information sharing.

As the nature of attacks and threats continues to morph, adapt, and accelerate in variety, defenders will have to be equally cagey in minimizing their vulnerability to attack. A standard also has the potential of significantly reducing the cost of analysis by minimizing the need for expensive proprietary connectors for vendor-specific logs. We applaud the efforts of eIQnetworks and hope that larger, more entrenched vendors will adopt such standards to benefit the industry as a whole.