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IBM Brings High-End UNIX Capabilities to Entry-Level Customers

By Joyce Tompsett Becknell

With the new eServer p630, IBM takes the technology capabilities of the larger p670 and p690 servers and packages them into an entry-level system that creates a serious price/performance offering for customers looking for a UNIX package. IBM argues you aren't required to compromise budget over functionality, an ongoing issue for conservative managers looking to stretch their money.

In the UNIX world, the really cool features congregate at the high end. Over time as vendor cost structures change, these features filter down across the midrange and low end of the product line. UNIX managers living with real world budgets are frequently required to negotiate between affordable servers and much-desired capabilities available only at higher price points or in systems that are too large for departmental scalability needs. With this dilemma in mind, IBM has endeavored to build a server that provides the performance and reliability of the high end of the pSeries line in a footprint that meets entry-level UNIX pricing requirements.

The brand new p630 is a one- to four-processor system, available in a 19-inch (4U) footprint, running on the same POWER4 architecture as its larger standalone p670 and p690 siblings. It currently supports the self-healing and self-managing capabilities that IBM has labeled under its autonomic computing efforts. The p630 server takes advantage of the Single Chip Module (SCM) that plugs one or two processor and memory cards directly on to a planar board and then wraps it up in book packaging. Servers have one or two books, depending on the number of processors in the system.

In addition, IBM has announced further improvements to the system slated for the rest of 2002 and early 2003. The system currently supports AIX 5L with Linux affinity. IBM expects to run native Linux on the system in the second half of 2002, and by yearend the system will also support clustering and dynamic logical partitions down to the microprocessor level, again in keeping with the larger systems in the family. Finally, the p630 system will have NEBS 3 compliance early next year.

IBM is positioning the server for specific customer environments. It can be used as a database server for mid-sized databases with application servers running on Wintel systems or smaller UNIX boxes. Conversely, the system can also serve as an application server for a database that runs on a larger UNIX system. The server will also be useful as a consolidation server for smaller workloads, particularly once dynamic logical partitioning becomes available later this year. The server can also function well as a distributed departmental server coupled with IBM's Workload Manager software. For most SMEs, this server winds up working as the de facto UNIX box since it covers most of those environments' needs.

Customers who have wanted to take advantage of the performance derived from the copper and silicon-on-insulator of the POWER4 family and the latest reliability and availability features designed to serve the entire eServer family now have an option at the entry point of the UNIX family. Midrange application-, departmental server-, and small and medium enterprise-UNIX environments can now take advantage of IBM's premium UNIX capabilities without busting the bank to do so.

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