Market Roundup

October 19, 2007

VMware Announces New SMB-Focused Offerings

By Clay Ryder

VMware has announced three new VMware Infrastructure packages that are designed to help IT administrators at SMBs make the decision to deploy virtual infrastructure. The SMB bundles are based on the latest release of VMware Infrastructure, which will include the new VMware ESX Server 3.5 and VirtualCenter 2.5, and are focused on decreasing power consumption, eliminating manual tracking and patching of virtual infrastructure, and increasing overall infrastructure availability. The new products targeting SMBs include VMware ESX Server 3i, VMware Guided Consolidation, and VMware Update Manager. VMware ESX Server 3i, VMware's firmware-based embed thin hypervisor, aims to help customers more rapidly deploy virtualization in their environments. VMware Guided Consolidation is designed to enable companies' migration from physical servers to virtual infrastructure through a step-by-step wizard that identifies physical servers for consolidation, converts them to virtual machines, and intelligently places them onto the most ideal VMware ESX Server or VMware Server host. VMware Update Manager automates patch-and-update management for VMware ESX Server hosts and virtual machines and is designed to relieve the significant pain point of tracking patch levels and manually applying security and bug fixes.

The new VMware bundles are packaged into three Acceleration Kits. VMware Infrastructure 3 Foundation Acceleration Kit ($2,995) has three 2-processor licenses of VMware Infrastructure Foundation—which includes VMware ESX Server, VMware Consolidated Backup, VMware Update Manager, VMware Virtual SMP, VMware VirtualCenter agen,t and VMware VMFS—as well as VMware VirtualCenter Foundation Server that includes VMware Guided Consolidation and the ability to manage up to three VMware Infrastructure server hosts. VMware Infrastructure 3 Standard High Availability Acceleration Kit ($5,995) has two 2-processor nodes of VMware Infrastructure Standard, which includes the VMware Infrastructure 3 Foundation Acceleration Kit plus VMware High Availability. VMware Infrastructure 3 Midsize Acceleration Kit ($14,495) has three 2-processor nodes of VMware Infrastructure Enterprise, which includes the VMware Infrastructure 3 Standard HA Acceleration Kit plus VMware VMotion, VMware Distributed Resource Scheduler (DRS), VMware Storage Vmotion, and VMware Distributed Power Management (DPM), as well as flexible training and consulting credits.

This latest release of VMware has plenty of technological capability to pique the interest of even the most jaded IT professional while the company continues its upward trek of refining its product offerings and incorporating new features. Of particular note, the emphasis on streamlining management and automation as well as improving overall availability and performance should resonate well with organizations that are seeking to maximize their business value from virtualization investments. In addition, we find the ability to move virtual machine disks across data stores intriguing as it serves to reduce further the physical dependencies that virtual solutions are ideally seeking to overcome completely. As the notion of virtualization continues to gain traction and maturity in the minds of IT directors and CTOs, the need for solutions to take a strategic posture and feature set grows accordingly. With this latest feature announcement, we see much in this regard by which to be encouraged.

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In the early days of tire kicking and technology poking, the technology is the most important consideration; nevertheless, all good technology aside, we believe that overall sales growth is driven much more by effective targeting and packaging of solutions than by raw technology. To our way of thinking, the three SMB-focused kits reflect this reality and correctly note that a one-size-fits-all approach targeted at SMBs is not sufficient either. We believe that these offerings address some of the more common SMB scenarios, i.e., an organization that is new to virtualization, an organization seeking HA from virtualized solution, and an organization that wants to deeply engage virtualization and develop in-depth inhouse expertise.

Overall, we view this feature and packaging preview as further evidence of the growing strategic value of virtualization. With the emphasis on management and automation as well as new renewed focus on delivering product and solution bundles that meet the needs to specific market segments, VMware continues to reinforce its position as the leading virtualization vendor. At the same time, the company is serving notice that it believes there are still more enhancements and extensions for virtualization technological to be made, and market opportunities to be had.

RedCannon Security Adds Secure OpenOffice Access

By Lawrence D. Dietz

RedCannon Security has announced direct support for OpenOffice applications through KeyPoint-enabled USB flash drives. The combined solution empowers mobile workers by allowing OpenOffice applications to be pushed to any USB stick, while ensuring through its KeyPoint solutions that only “trusted” or “locked-down” versions of OpenOffice applications are used. KeyPoint Alchemy transforms any USB flash drive into a trusted corporate access and storage device, and offers endpoint security and mobile encryption to any off-the-shelf flash drive. It includes business applications and KeyPoint Vault, a centrally managed mobile storage solution providing standards-based, military-grade software encryption and storage. KeyPoint Alchemy with support for OpenOffice and Java Run Time Engine is available now.

We appear to be on the precipice of the untethered age, with a few complementary trends evolving. One is the blurring of the line between work time and off time. The ubiquity of the BlackBerry and its cousins and the maturity of generations who have grown up in the digital age (sometimes called digital natives) are changing the patterns of many industries, with work time becoming any time someone wants to take advantage of connectivity. A second trend is the migration away from traditional computing models wherein users are tethered to a single computer whether it is company-provided or individually owned. Lastly, there is also a growing concern about security and privacy of sensitive information. This concern would certainly extend to information processed through OpenOffice or similar applications. While the use of open source applications continues to gain adoption worldwide, many mobile workers find that the ability to carry a secure and personally configured office suite on a USB or other mobile storage device is even more life-changing. Extending work beyond the office has become the norm, and the ability to remain productive and efficient anywhere in the world without disrupting one’s established virtual work environment is invaluable.

RedCannon’s announcement is significant because it seems to address all of these trends. While there may be conflicting opinions on the future of mobile devices, it seems inevitable that sooner or later individuals will want to carry more of their data and working papers around in a very portable form factor such as a “J” drive. This information will likely include sensitive and private information that the user and the user’s employer will want to safeguard. We believe that the approach offered by RedCannon is analysis-worthy because it appears to offer a way to safeguard the information on the new form factor in a familiar and transparent fashion. Normally we argue strongly for implementing security into the technology before its adoption, but in this case the OpenOffice horse is out of the barn, so it makes sense to add on measures, like those from Red Cannon, that can secure sensitive information based on its value, not its location. Organizations that have adopted OpenOffice would do well to consider the security implications of this major architectural shift.

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Sun Announces New T2-Based Servers and Blades

By Clay Ryder

Sun Microsystems has announced new UltraSPARC T2-based solutions, the Sun SPARC Enterprise T5120/T5220 servers and the Sun Blade T6320 modules, targeting organizations that seek to enhance their virtualization capabilities, increase system utilization, and improve energy efficiency. The new servers were created through a unified design approach whereby Sun's x64 and CMT servers share system architecture designs and chassis with consistently located and swappable components. The Sun SPARC Enterprise T5120/T5220 servers are the first servers using the UltraSPARC T2 processor, and in conjunction with the Solaris OS target organizations seeking to achieve increased scale, density, and performance with reduced energy consumption, particularly in the Web and application tiers and for technical workloads. The servers feature built-in open source no-cost virtualization capabilities, Solaris Containers, and Logical Domains (LDoms), which enable IT staff to maximize system utilization; the new servers are the are the first servers to be instantly discoverable on the network via Sun Connection. The Sun Blade T6320 server module delivers features and functionality comparable with the SPARC Enterprise T5120/T5220 systems in a blade form factor that is supported in the Sun Blade 6000 modular system. According to the company, the Sun Blade T6320 server module is the fastest performing single-socket blade, consumes nearly 30% less power, and is optimized for large multi-node installations. Sun also announced solutions based upon the SPARC Enterprise T5120/T5220 and Sun Blade T6320 server modules focused on message security and Web server encryption.

The potential for large-scale parallel processing as envisioned by this hardware is considerable, but will not be realized until organizations update their operating systems and applications to take advantage of this new paradigm in processor architecture. Developing multithreaded software requires new developer knowledge and techniques, as well as the requisite toolkits to support the creation of multithreaded applications. Accordingly, there is where the Sun Studio 12 toolset comes into play with its ability to automate the creation of parallel or multithreaded code. In a marketplace where virtualization is the buzzword du jour, the reality of a single socket delivering eight cores with eight threads each is seemingly counter to the beat of the marketplace drummer. Yet in reality, this multicore, multithread approach is actually quite complementary to virtualization schemes, as it shares the basic tenet that there is a lot of unused idle technology at any given point in time. With virtualization delivered through Containers and Logical Domains, the complexity of these new systems could rise to dizzying proportions if left to simple manual operation. Fortunately, Sun Management Center 4.0 and other tools/aspects of Solaris provide monitoring and management functions necessary for IT professionals to take advantage of these new servers while helping ensure availability, optimum performance, and scalability of virtualized environments within Solaris Containers.

With respect to blade and other densely populated architectures, we believe the low power consumption of Sun's latest processors may play well into the power and heat conscious datacenter manager's concerns. If Sun can effectively deliver the compute power of sixty-four individual systems on a single server or blade that it claims along with the promised 6x performance/watt, the company will be well positioned to deliver substantial reductions in energy consumed per processing task to its customer base. As such, Sun would be well equipped to reinforce its position as a leading eco-friendly vendor for the datacenter. The multicore, multithreaded nature of this processor delivers considerable computational punch; however, it is also indicative of the future of not only processor technology, but the basic composition of servers and software architecture as well. Just as we see dual-core and quad-core processors becoming common today, in the not too distant future we will likely be discussing higher numbers of compute cores in a taken-for-granted fashion as the reality of physics, power, and thermal dynamics change our preconceptions of how processors will continue to gain performance while observing an increasingly strict energy envelope.

IBM Beefs Up DB2 With Encryption from Vormetric

By Lawrence D. Dietz

Vormetric, Inc. announced this week that it has partnered with IBM to deliver database encryption capabilities for DB2 on Windows, Linux, and Unix. IBM will offer Vormetric's data security solution as part of its data server

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portfolio, addressing customer demand for increased protection of sensitive data. This new capability is delivered in IBM Database Encryption Expert, initially available for the new DB2 9.5 "Viper 2" data server. Vormetric's file-level approach to database encryption helps IBM Database Encryption Expert offer high-level performance combined with a non-invasive implementation. Because the Vormetric solution protects databases at the file level and minimizes the impact on critical applications, it can reduce or eliminates the need for users to change applications or databases. IBM Database Encryption Expert provides database backup encryption, database tablespace encryption, access control, host integrity, and auditing in highly distributed environments without extensive management complexity or additional infrastructure costs.

Most end-user organizations have their heads in the sand when it comes to encryption. The very notion of employing encryption is an anathema to many organizations especially in mid-size organizations whose IT departments are not robust enough to tackle anything beyond those projects that impact day-to-day operations and/or the organization's core business. However, a plethora of recent events make it clear that organizations have a responsibility to those that entrust them with sensitive data. Furthermore, organizations who are loath to see their names in the paper for a data breach or who would like to avoid the unpleasantness associated with notification of data owners of an actual or suspected breach should consider encryption as preventative medicine. Many jurisdictions such as California have laws stating explicitly that encrypted data is exempt from the notification provisions, since it is presumed that the encrypted data is secure.

A team approach such as the one with IBM and Vormetric should be able to help end users implement encryption as an effective deterrent to data exposure. However, end-user organizations will have to pay strict attention to the implementation and ongoing support required for the combination of products and should devote adequate internal management resources to manage the consulting relationship that is likely to be needed, at least for the initial implementation, installation, and training. End-user organizations should also assess alternative means to encrypt their sensitive data outside the DB2 environment to guard against accidental exposure or targeted attacks.

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