EJBs: Great Expectations

Backers of Enterprise JavaBeans now must deliver on cross-platform pledge

By Antone Gonsalves and Michael Moeller

The ejb 1.0 specification debuts this week to the lofty expectations of developers looking for an alternative to Windows-only distributed applications.

As dozens of tool, component and server software vendors line up in support of Enterprise JavaBeans at Sun Microsystems Inc.'s JavaOne conference in San Francisco, one question remains: Will they work?

“The specification shows promise for standardization and unity among the Java community, instead of fragmentation,” said Jonathan Clay, chief technology officer at Novell Inc. in Cambridge, Mass., who is planning to evaluate EJBs. “But where’s the beef? So far, it’s just a spec.”

With IBM, Netscape Communications Corp., Oracle Corp., Sybase Inc., Borland International Inc., Symantec Corp. and others ready to deliver EJB-based products, the prospects look strong for NT that we need to, from a security perspective.”

Security Issues Still Dog NT; Changes Due in 5.0

By Jim Kerstetter and Michael Moeller

Internal hacker attacks on Windows NT may be grabbing the headlines, but IT administrators remain more concerned about managing the operating system's security shortcomings internally.

A host of companies, including Microsoft Corp., are expected to add new security features to the next beta of Windows NT 5.0, some IT managers continue to wonder if NT's defenses are enterprise-ready. “It's not that the OS is completely insecure,” said Mike Nacke, a systems administrator at Cinergy Corp., in Indianapolis. “But right now you just can't do some of the things with NT that we need to, from a security perspective.”

With NT 5.0 Beta 2, due next quarter, Microsoft will add a new visual security policy manager, called the Security Configuration Editor, that will give administrators tighter control over enterprise-wide domains.

NT 5.0 is expected to ship late this year or early in 1999, although Microsoft won't commit to a targeted ship date.

And on tap for Beta 2 are Kerberos authentication, which will improve interoperability with Unix systems; support for x.509 digital certificates and public-key infrastructure; and a fivefold increase in the number of users allowed in NetWare domains.

Last spring, Prince became one of a growing number of IT managers who are considering switching to NetWare, including units from Novell Inc. and other vendors. Prince has already begun to pull the plug on Windows NT systems and replace them with NetWare-based Unix systems.

A Network for All Seasons

Cisco Systems is announcing at CeBIT a raft of hardware and software designed to sell corporate customers on the notion of a multi-service network that combines voice and data.

Party Like It's PC 99

Microsoft will entertain proposals on the next generation of PC technology, as outlined in its PC 99 Design Guide, at this week's WinHEC conference.

Up, Up and Away for MCI, TWA?

MCI Systemhouse is working to clinch an outsourcing deal with TWA to take the helm of the airline's IT functions. Neither side is providing details, but a deal could be announced soon.

Novell Bets Big on Java

By Claudia Graziano

Novell Inc. will try once again to convince its customers that NetWare has what it takes to be a full-blown application server and Web development environment.

One year after making its first appearance as Novell's CEO, Eric Schmidt will take the stage at the company's BrainShare conference in Salt Lake City to unveil his vision of making NetWare a robust platform for hosting mission-critical applications and managing heterogeneous networks.

Key to Novell's strategy is the last-minute enhancement to NetWare 5.0, which is scheduled to ship by midyear. One addition is component software licensed from WebLogic Inc. for making Windows NT network services—such as the Active Directory—available on a Java-enabled NetWare network.

Equally important to corporate customers with heavy investments in NetWare are the extensions to Novell's eDirectory.
How to Clean Up That Messy Metadata

Microsoft’s OIM update could serve as a standard for data warehouses

R ig ht now, however, it’s hard for W right to give her data warehouse users what they want. I deal y, that would mean giving them access to the so-called metadata associated with the company’s data warehouse. S omething like the data warehouse’s yellow pages, metadata is essentially a collection of facts about the data and other elements of the warehouse. It can tell you, for example, how recently a piece of data in the warehouse was updated, which source systems produced it and how it was transformed before it was stored in the warehouse.

The problem for W right and most other data architects today is that, rather than being stored in one place in a consistent format, metadata is usually scattered, inconsistent and hard to find. That’s because, for now, each tool that IS uses to build and run a data warehouse creates and stores its own version of metadata in its own proprietary repository and format. As a result, IS managers such as W right either must integrate metadata themselves, at considerable time and effort, or give up on providing consistent metadata access to users and developers.

“It’s a big problem,” says Doug Hackney, a data warehousing consultant and author based in Hudson, Wis. “The No. 1 comment I’ve gotten from my clients involving metadata over the last three years is, “Show me a standard. Now.”

It appears M icrosoft Corp. is trying to do just that. N ext month, the Redmond, Wash., company is expected to publish extensions to the M icrosoft Repository and OIM (Open Information M ode l) that many vendors and IS managers hope will become the foundation for a standards-based approach to metadata integration. C urrently, design tools such as Logic Work’s Inc.’s E R win, for ex-

CONTINUED ON P AGE 82

Paul C. Tinnirello says tools can be like Stairmasters: Big, pricey paperweights
Service Scores

Continued from Page 79

were pending, the company’s CIO promptly deployed a team to “fix” the help desk, but the group soon discovered that their support problems ran much deeper.

“We’ve had so many disjointed processes that our customers were confused and downright frustrated,” says Johnson. The team went back to the CIO and recommended re-engineering the entire support operation. Fortunately the executive didn’t need to be convinced. The re-engineering effort began in October 1995 and is now in its third phase. The project does not yet have a specific end date.

Teamwork

Duke’s DUNK team spent two years on its re-engineering effort, which links multiple, previously disparate help desks through a common interface and knowledge base. Now users can request help and be assured of a timely, accurate response by making a phone call, sending an e-mail or fax, walking into the support office, or surfing the help desk Web site. But according to Verghis, the technology was the least important part of the re-engineering project. “Most companies fixate on the technology. A II that pales in comparison to the organizational stuff,” says Verghis, who now leads the second- and third-tier support staff who sets up support applications (such as SAP AG’s R/3) and Lotus Development Corp.’s Notes.

DUNK’s success, for example, depended on cooperation between the CIOs of Duke’s OIT and its Medical Center Information Systems groups, which handle separate functions. The two IT execs split the cost of implementation, although Verghis declined to specify how much they actually spent. The pair also championed the project by communicating the need to develop a comprehensive, scalable support system.

Now, the help desk offers users a common set of SLAs (service-level agreements)—for example, for institutional applications such as Duke’s budget process accounting application. When that program was rolled out in 1995, each help desk resolved problems differently and used its own SLAs. The desks also tracked problems manually, so workers risked losing requests. Moreover, the process was complex. The OIT help desk, for instance, guaranteed to resolve problems with the budget application in 1 hour, but took 17 steps to escalate unresolved calls for help to the third-tier support group.

Implementing common SLAs was just one of the many project changes that enabled the DUNK team to implement a shared help desk system. Now, unresolved problems with mission-critical applications can be escalated to third-tier support in just three steps, regardless of which help desk takes the request. The help desk system, Remedy Corp.’s Remedy Help Desk, automatically pages a technician when a ticket is entered. At the same time, Remedy starts a timer. If the ticket remains unsolved in 15 minutes, the system pages a second-tier support person and so on until the problem is resolved.

The results have been dramatic. Before re-engineering, Duke’s help desk fielded some 8,800 inquiries during the September rush but solved only 60 percent in the first call. Last September, the same number of people—four full-time employees and a roster of part-time student workers that equates to two full-timers—handled 53,200 requests and solved 90 percent of the problems in the first call.

Dave Kringstad, team leader for the help desk in the central IT department at Honeywell Inc., in Minneapois, is also a fan of revamping processes before deploying technology—in H Honeywell’s case, a Web-based problem tracker set to roll out in May. Eventually, users will enter their own trouble tickets through the help desk, Honeywell’s support group’s Web site.

Help desk hoops

To keep the help desk rolling, support experts are championing tools that link SLAs (service-level agreements) and help desk problem resolution. Among the vendors currently offering SLA management features are:

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<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>PRODUCT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applix Inc.</td>
<td>Applix Helpdesk</td>
<td>Monitors compliance with SLAs and automates reminders, escalation and reassignment of problems based on SLAs.</td>
<td>$14,995 for a five-user license</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bendata Inc. (subsidiary of Asta Software Artistry Inc.)</td>
<td>Support Management</td>
<td>Tool for evaluating and designing support center processes. Data from the Process Design Module, which allows managers to design and document processes for call flows and incident handling, is incorporated into SLAs generated by the Service Level Management Module.</td>
<td>$6,200 for three users; $30,000 for 15 users</td>
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<tr>
<td>ClearHelpdesk</td>
<td>Provides interfaces to SLAs and trend analysis reports.</td>
<td>$15,000 per server ($3,750 per concurrent user)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Datawatch Corp.</td>
<td>Q-Support for Windows</td>
<td>Allows users to define SLAs, track compliance with established standards and contractual obligations, and measure service-level performance.</td>
<td>$6,200 for three users; $30,000 for 15 users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Associates Inc. (formerly McAfee Associates Inc.)</td>
<td>McAfee Total ServiceDesk Suite</td>
<td>Automates escalation rules based on contract definitions and policy requirements.</td>
<td>$4,995 per seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedy Corp.</td>
<td>Remedy Service Level Agreements</td>
<td>Uses SLAs to measure and report help desk performance.</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tivoli Systems Inc. (formerly Software Artistry Inc.)</td>
<td>SA-Expertise suite for Enterprise Support Management</td>
<td>Will include an SLA management component in Expert Advisor; the suite’s problem management tool, to allow users to define and monitor compliance with SLAs. The SLA component will be available by the second quarter of 1998.</td>
<td>$3,000 per seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utopia Technology Partners Inc.</td>
<td>Utopia HelpDesk for Windows</td>
<td>Tracks compliance with SLAs.</td>
<td>$1,500 to $3,000 per user</td>
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Messy Metadata

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ample, have their own repositories and create proprietary metadata. The same goes for data transformation tools such as Extract from Evolvent Technologies Inc. and for query and reporting tools such as Business Objects from Business Objects Inc. While some companies, such as Prism Solutions Inc. and Platinum Technology Inc., have teamed up to create bidirectional interfaces between their own repositories, that doesn’t help organizations with tools that don’t use the same interfaces.

That’s where the latest Microsoft effort comes in. While OIM was announced last summer and positioned as a common definition for standard metadata integration, the initial version was targeted mainly at client/server application development tools. Version 2 of OIM adds definitions useful to data warehousing tools.

Building bridges

So far, 65 vendors have signed up to support the Microsoft Repository and OIM in some fashion. Some, including Platinum Technology, have already said they’ll replace their own repository with the Microsoft Repository and extend their data model to support OIM. Others, such as SAS Institute Inc., have said they’ll build a bridge between their repository and data model and the Microsoft Repository and OIM. If enough vendors fall in line and actually deliver, data warehousing tools could begin to share metadata out of the box, and IS managers such as Wright could soon get out of the metadata integration business.

That’s still a big if, though. Few data warehousing tool vendors are shipping products that support the Microsoft Repository and OIM. A nd two major data warehousing tool vendors, called the MetaData Coalition, have already resulted in a loose confederation of data warehousing tool vendors. The most recent such attempts to create industry standards for metadata integration have so far not conferred their blessing on the Microsoft Repository and OIM standard.

Improved help desk and systems management tools are also bringing relief to the help desk at Children’s Hospital, in Boston, where an eight-person staff that services between 6,000 and 7,000 users is crammed into an 11-by-16-foot office near Boston’s Fenway Park.

Everyone at the hospital is cramped for real estate, explains Beth Bitner, a help desk manager at Children’s, so naturally the medical staff gets first dibs on new digs. Nonetheless, the desk is under mounting pressure to provide better help desk service to the hospital, which is migrating from Digital Equipment Corp.’s System Management Server to Microsoft’s OIM and that it would support the Microsoft standard.

Microsoft has worked closely with vendors pushing standards such as OIM. While M icrosoft has worked closely with vendors such as Platinum in defining data warehousing extensions to OIM, the company has been less open to input from large customers. “Microsoft’s very reluctant to share a lot of information on OIM,” says Andres Perez, IT data architect at USA A Federal Credit Union Inc., an insurance and financial services company in San Antonio.

Even those critical of the Microsoft metadata definitions are a long way from the Microsoft standard. What’s more, some vendors are so critical of OIM as immature. Microsoft has said, for example, that the OIM definition won’t be useful in the meantime. OIM already allows for the basic sharing of components between development tools. The next release will create some basic metadata interoperability between data warehousing tools this year, says Arrow.

Many vendors will begin by using the OIM definitions as a least common denominator for metadata integration. Relational OLA P vendor MicroStrategy Inc., of Vienna, Va., for example, plans to use the Microsoft Repository and OIM definitions as a staging area between its metadata and metadata from other tools.

Even that limited level of metadata integration will help, says IS managers. “The Microsoft Repository and OIM are probably our best shot at getting some help,” says Wright. “The sooner the better.”

Conti

Executive

Front-Line Help

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 81

part of a 19-month statewide data center consolidation. This year, the agency is also introducing a client/server-based patient tracking system to all the hospital wards, which will completely eliminate the existing paper system—no doubt increasing calls to the help desk.

That rollout and the consolidation “will have a huge impact on our resources,” says Blumkin. That’s good news, considering that the help desk already depends on second- and third-tier support to solve at least 40 percent of users’ computer problems.

One option is to deploy his current help desk software, Support Magic from Magic Solutions Inc., to the mental health facilities so support liaison can access the tool’s knowledge base directly. He’s also considering a help desk tool that has an unlimited licensing agreement, which would allow him to deploy the product directly to users.