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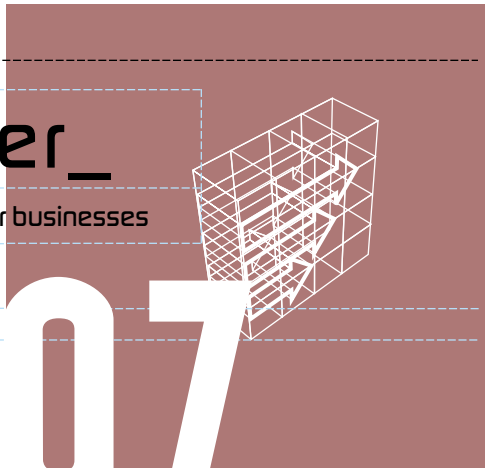

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NUTS + JOLTS_

APP SERVERS STRATEGIC TOOL IN WEB ARCHITECTURE

CRN TEST CENTER_ recommended

By Mario Morejon—New York

From e-business transactions to enterprise application integration, application servers are becoming a strategic tool for firms looking to conduct business on the Web. An increasing number of vendors are supporting the enterprise Java architecture, which is becoming the accepted model for application deployment.

Whether one is creating a fast-growing e-commerce site or leveraging legacy systems, these servers pack enough features to support almost every need, from publisher-subscribe messaging services to XML translators to even portal services.

The importance of development tools cannot be overestimated. After all, ease of development leads to rapid deployment. Consider IDEs that integrate well with application servers or that at least emulate a complete transactional process. When dealing with several layers of processes, from HTML page requests to database access by entity beans, having the capability to step through a complete transaction can save hours of debugging.

Also, since this is an object-oriented framework, binding all of the code to specific third-party products or business components goes against the good programming practice of code reuse.

Fortunately, a number of vendors provide API abstraction layers. But be aware that some vendors use proprietary code that could create unwanted dependencies. If used correctly, extending code through abstraction can offer benefits such as database independence or even session failover protection of Enterprise JavaBeans (EJBs).

And pay attention to the administrative consoles. Fine-tuning a server component such as a Java Virtual Machine (JVM) thread or a database connection pool can greatly increase overall performance.

APP SERVERS BROADEN PARTNER PROGRAMS

By Preston P. Forman—New York

Intensely profitable but long a yawn of a product category, middleware in the form of application server software is coming into its own.

"The application server infrastructure is really becoming like the new Web operating system," says Jeremy Allaire, co-founder and chief technologist at Allaire, Newton, Mass. (*CRN*, March 13, 2000)

Like most technologies, the rush to the Web is driving growth in the application-server market. As the Test Center has seen with other software underpinning the Internet, vendors are so swamped with business that they are retrofitting channel programs and certifications to expand their market presence and garner solution providers.

"For VARs that used to move hardware, their eyes should open up to these software-related services," says IBM's Jerry Gschwind, channel development manager for WebSphere. "There is just an amazing

IBM TECHNICAL AND CHANNEL WINNER

EDITORS' CHOICE

The CRN Test Center gave the Editors' Choice award to IBM for its WebSphere Application Server because of its technical excellence and astounding channel program.

Based on extensive consultation with customers, this application server now incorporates features specifically designed to enhance performance.

From intuitive administration facilities to development services well-recognized and widely used by the industry, the WebSphere application server, along with its suite of application accelerators, can fulfill most high-end e-commerce projects.

When it comes to the channel, IBM was head and shoulders above the competition in marketing, education and partner relations. With the company's e-business marketing campaign, IBM appeals to both enterprises and the small- and midsize-business (SMB) sector and has programs that target both markets.

The strongest element of IBM's channel program is its best practices "distillation," a Web- or CD-based database outlining the methodologies of 20,000-plus engagements. A solution provider can plug in information and quickly get going. Also check out the StartNow program, comprised of templates and applications aimed at getting SMB clients on the Web quickly.

The Test Center also notes the technical prowess of Art Technology Group's Dynamo Application Server. With its open and highly modular product architecture, Dynamo presents a powerful development methodology for the application server market.

VENDOR/PRODUCT NAME	Development tools	Administration	J2EE support	Integration with other standards	Technical overall	Channel overall	OVERALL RATING
Allaire JRun 3.0	B+	A	A+	B+	A	B	B+
Art Technology Group Dynamo Application Server 5	A+	A	A+	A+	A+	C	B
BEA WebLogic Server 5.1	A+	B	A+	A+	A	B	B+
IBM WebSphere Application Server v3.5	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A	A+
iPlanet Application Server 6.0	B+	A	A	A	A	C	B
Sybase EAServer 3.6	A	A	A	A	A	B	B+
BLUE DENOTES EDITORS' CHOICE	16%	5%	16%	13%	50%	50%	100%

IBM WEBSPHERE APPLICATION SERVER V3.5
PRICE_ $7,500
COMPANY_ IBM, Somers, N.Y.
(800) 426-4968
www.ibm.com

PHOTO: David Toerge

amount of business out there. It's expand or be left behind."

Along with loosening requirements, most vendors in this review are throttling back their professional services organizations to eliminate channel conflict, and more to the point, to push more business to partners. In turn, the professional service organizations are turning into technical services arms for solution providers to tap for assistance or to be subcontracted.

"Last year this time, 50 percent of our business was driven from building Web sites. As we've scaled down our solutions business, we are now a more traditional software company," says Mark Walls, director of channel sales and strategic alliance program at Art Technology Group, Cambridge, Mass. "Now it is 70-30, with most of that as a supplement to a partner."

IBM, which has made e-business its mantra over the past two years, offers the broadest program in this review, positioning it to appeal not only to its traditional enterprise account base but also to small and midsize businesses.

The company offers a Web- or CD-based database of best practices for deploying applications based on IBM's experience with more than 20,000 engagements. The database can create an environment ready to write code, and also includes installation and configuration aides. For the SMB-oriented solution provider, IBM offers StartNow, a set of templates and applications for quickly getting an application off the ground. The company also offers financing.

While ATG has a largely traditional channel program, the sale of its product is different than most—its application server is almost exclusively sold direct to the client via the company's Web site. ATG does not offer agent fees to solution providers.

"Even if we allowed people to resell, in the end building the solution is where the margin is," says Walls. According to various industry estimates, solution providers can expect $5 to $11 for every dollar spent on the actual application server.

CHANNEL PROGRAMS PROVIDED BY VENDORS

CRN TEST CENTER

	Allaire	ATG	BEA	IBM	iPlanet	Sybase
AVERAGE MARGIN						
Average margin (points)	12	†	30	30	15	30
DISTRIBUTES TO:						
Major distributors	●	❍	●	●	●	●
Specialty distributors	●	❍	❍	●	❍	●
Systems integrators	●	❍	●	●	●	●
VARs	●	❍	●	●	●	●
Retailers/dealers	●	❍	❍	❍	●	●
End users	●	●	●	●	●	●
DISCOUNT PROGRAMS						
Volume discounts offered	●	❍	●	●	●	●
One or multiple tiers	M	NA	One	M	M	M
One-time discount for large sales	❍	●	●	●	❍	●
SOLUTION PROVIDER SUPPORT						
Help desk	B	V	B	V	B	B
Sales training	B	V	B	V	B	B
Technical training	B	V	B	V	B	B
General business training	B	V	❍	V	❍	B
Presales support	V	V	B	V	B	B
Post-sales support	V	V	B	V	D	B
Team sales	B	V	B	V	B	B
Free technical support	V	V	B	V	D	V
White papers	B	V	B	V	B	B
Advisory councils	B	❍	❍	V	❍	V
Online/software configurator	B	❍	❍	V	❍	❍
Competitive upgrade offered	B	❍	❍	V	❍	B
Partnering program	V	V	B	V	❍	V
Separate solution provider Web site	V	V	V	V	V	V
Site password-protected	V	V	V	V	V	V
SOLUTION PROVIDER AUTHORIZATION						
Sales	●	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Service	●	●	❍	❍	❍	❍
Agent/consultant model	❍	❍	●	●	❍	❍
LEAD-GENERATION POLICY						
Vendor passes leads to solution provider	●	●	●	●	●	●
Leads prequalified by vendor	●	●	●	●	●	●
Leads furnished free by vendor	●	●	●	●	●	●
Solution provider required to report back	●	●	●	❍	❍	●
DEMO-UNIT POLICY						
Demos offered free to VARs	F	F	F	F	F	F
MDFs can be used to buy demos	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
MARKET-DEVELOPMENT FUNDS						
Co-op funds available	❍	●	❍	●	●	❍
Periodic spiffs/rebates	●	❍	●	●	❍	●
Funds based on volume or sales	Both	*	Sales	Both	*	Sales
VENDOR INVENTORY POLICY						
Distributor or vendor offers price protection	B	NA	B	V	B	V
RETURN POLICY						
Freight, insurance on unsold or returned product	D	NA	*	V	*	*
Freight, insurance on DOA units	V	NA	*	V	*	V
Vendor drop-ships	❍	NA	❍	●	❍	●

KEY

● = Yes
B = Both vendor and distributor
F = Free
NA = Not applicable/not available
† = Solution providers do not sell product
❍ = No
D = Distributor
M = Multiple
V = Vendor
* = Varies

IBM WEBSPHERE APPLICATION SERVER, ADVANCED EDITION V3.5

WEBSPHERE FINE-TUNED BY CUSTOMERS

At the core of the WebSphere architecture lies an application server with services and tools built on top of "application accelerators." The accelerators can be portal servers, application host connectors or even business components, to use IBM's nomenclature. The tools provide all the necessary layers to build complete Web commerce and application integration processes.

The server extensions written by IBM for its Web server provide caching for static HTML pages. IBM calls this technology the Fast Response Cache Accelerator. Files are looped back to browsers before the Web server processes the request internally.

A similar technique used to boost performance, called fragment caching, is used with JSPs, Servlets and EJBs. Once a JVM is instantiated, method calls can be designated read-only and maintained in read cache. Data accessed from those methods can be maintained persistently in a prepared statement cache to improve read-only access time from a database.

To improve session response, WebSphere is

designed based on an 80/20 read/write rule, where IBM estimates, based on its research, that 80 percent of the time data is accessed only for reads in any given e-commerce site.

Another level of performance tweaking used by the IBM JVM is handling local methods by reference, as opposed to treating calls by value, which is what the J2EE specifies. This granular control on individual components and files becomes valuable when dealing with hundreds of application modules.

WebSphere Studio manages all of the application server's components. It can also be used for large-scale development projects since it can register modules across multiple servers.

This tool excels in server-side distributed debugging. Source code can be debugged across multiple application servers through a single point, making versioning manageable.

The Advanced and Professional editions of WebSphere come with a rules-based framework of EJBs used for building business-logic components. Rules are created by a SQL-like language using parameterized beans.

Another great tool is the administrative console, which provides a single logical image for a system across an enterprise. Application servers can be easily cloned through this console by copying the properties of other servers. Clustering services for the app server are provided by the WebSphere Edge server.

PRICE: $7,500
WARRANTY: 2 years
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AUTHORIZATION REQUIREMENTS: Depending on program level, company may require between one and three IBM professional certifications
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