

SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT: SUPPLIER PROFILE



IBM Tivoli has broad business appeal

IBM's multi-function Tivoli is proving popular with businesses, with IT governance at its core. **Nick Booth** reports

IBM Tivoli at a glance

Main products: Tivoli, ITUP

Major customers: Coca-Cola, Barclays, British Airways

Market share: 25%

Annual revenue: \$7.7bn

Number of staff: 12,000 worldwide

The IBM Tivoli suite of products is a pretty broad church. The range of functions it can manage varies from monitoring and discovery of assets to business service management, which links business services and organisational value.

“Over the past few years we have been translating the model from systems management to service management,” says Mark Fieldhouse, strategy manager for IBM Tivoli.

In this respect, IBM could be accused of aping BMC's positioning – putting process over technology – but it includes some advanced event-management features.

The challenge it faces is in meeting the demand for IT governance. It is working on a better link between a project and portfolio management capability, a level of integration which is a fundamental characteristic of IT governance. This is itself only significant because IBM has made IT governance such a key priority, because it allows the company to build on its product and consultancy offerings.

IBM has made clear its commitment to its governance and risk management strategy, and analysts say they expect further progress in the coming months.

IBM Tivoli needed to offer greater flexibility in the IT workforce. This was a prerequisite to CIOs to being able to bring about major benefits for their companies, by redeploying resources to the more productive, value-adding activities.

Mixed reaction

Will Cappelli, research vice-president at Gartner, says, “The Tivoli portfolio has arisen from many mergers and acquisitions, which has led to a confusing and inconsistent strategy.” Cappelli believes IT directors understand the complexity of systems management in global businesses, and will wait for IBM to evolve the Tivoli product family. “But IBM is facing stiff competition from HP, CA and BMC,” he says.

Meanwhile, Roy Illsley, senior researcher at analyst firm Butler Group, says, “It is properly integrated at the data layer, not just a veneer on top of existing management tools.”

This level of integration is essential for any enterprise-wide tool set, says Illsley. “As long as third-party tools can also be integrated at this level, IBM's Universal Agent provides this capability,” he says.

IBM Tivoli has, like many large suppliers' products in this market, tried to follow the best practice guidelines of the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL). But, on the other hand, when IBM is in more expansive mode, it has created a far-reaching set of tools.

Its integrated suite of products can cover the entire spectrum of Tivoli Storage Manager. This enables IBM Tivoli to provide a single role-based portal approach to the user interface. The upshot of this is that all of this

“Over the past few years we have been translating the model from systems management to service management”

Information can be made available to all the relevant people.

Configuration

The link to business service management is a significant capability in any systems management tool, says Illsley. In particular, the configuration of business rules that can drive a fully automated response.

It might, for example, work on the basis of predictive analysis of the systems to invoke a security or backup response. This would completely

transform the IT support function from a reactive response unit to a proactive added-value unit.

One of the downsides of this technology is that these advanced, predictive capabilities are possible only for certain event types. Additionally, they require the supporting technology for implementation. However, analysts say that as IBM builds on the potential capabilities of its IBM Tivoli product range, these automatic, predictive responses will be the foundations of an impressive value propo-

sition. Businesses will be able to see where they can expect their return on investment, and it will not be difficult to visualise the scale.

IBM has one important differentiator, say analysts. The IBM Tivoli unified process product is a point of difference between IBM and its competitors, says Butler's Illsley, because it provides a tool that helps managers to define processes.

This tool and these processes can be based on a number of standard frameworks, from Cobit (Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology), to ITIL, Six Sigma, or any others.

Illsley thinks this is in line with what CIOs have been telling him. IBM has delivered a suite of products that provide most of the tools the market wants, he says. But there is scope for improvement.

The competition

How does IBM compare to the competition though? Other suppliers have developed products along similar lines. However, the differences are in the details. These depend on the range of capabilities offered and these in turn hinge on a supplier's ability to integrate them with business processes.

This is where IBM has an advantage, as its service capabilities have blessed it with the ability to shape technology around business processes, and not the other way around.

The supplier's ability to implement the solutions in a modular format, which can then work with the third-party tools that the end-user may have invested in, is a major strength.

"IBM Tivoli is one of the best tools on the market for anyone needing comprehensive feature sets keeping control of a complex IT infrastructure," says Illsley.

IBM was canny in recognising this shift at an early stage. It started converting its Tivoli product range from the previous architectural framework towards this web-enabled delivery mechanism. Who would have thought IBM would triumph in a race to provide open systems?

If there is a criticism, it is that understanding the individual product capabilities is not easy – particularly if they were optional add-ons. Overall, though, analysts say IBM Tivoli is an excellent product with features that competitor products lack. ●

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