

The SOA bleeding Edge

Something as radically different as an SOA requires radically new products. Two companies are taking that gamble with unusual approaches to creating and running services.

Webalo Inc. in Santa Monica, Calif., aims to make it easier for end users to control the look and feel of data presented to them in an SOA by representing the service consumer (which could be a person or a device, such as a BlackBerry) as just another service within the SOA.

Most SOA tools, says Webalo co-founder and Chief technology officer Seth Bruder, focus on "abstracting" service providers (such as applications or databases) and making their information available as a service over the network. But on the receiving end, developers have to create complex software to present that information in a form usable for the receiving device, such as a handheld.

The Webalo user Proxy "allows a business consumer and user to drive content and presentation and interface with those back-end systems" in a more natural way, says Bruder. The proxy will first see the light of day through a partnership with IBM, which last month was scheduled to roll it out in an IBM-branded service called the Mobile dashboard for transmitting critical business information to mobile users.

While it's too soon to say how successful Webalo will be, the company is right to focus on the "consumer" side of the services equation, says Jason Bloomberg, an analyst at Zapthink. Such a user proxy will eliminate the work of writing separate translation software for each device. As more companies figure out how to produce services, he predicts, "more and more of the focus is going to be on the consumer side, whether it's multiple form factors or other sort of rich-client capabilities or consumer-centric [issues]."

Bilal Khokhar, development manager for field applications at UNICCO, says he would definitely be interested in such a proxy to help him develop his own services-enabled dashboard, which would draw data from multiple corporate databases to give top managers an instant overview of business performance.

If Webalo is "abstracting" service providers, then Azul Systems Inc. in Mountain View, Calif., is abstracting processing power with network-attached processing appliances that make compute power instantly available to any service that needs it, says Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer Shahin Khan.

Azul's CentriCore appliance has another advantage for SOA, says Khan: It's designed to run the virtual machines that are the executable components of services. The appliance uses a combination of software techniques and hardware-assisted features to perform garbage collection (freeing up memory no longer needed by applications) without pausing the applications. This allows the virtual machines to get the full performance boost of the hundreds of processor cores in a CentriCore appliance. It also includes specialized hardware for managing multiple application threads so they, too, can exploit the appliance's multiple cores, he says.

Khan declines to say how many of the appliances the company has sold since they went on sale last June. They cost approximately \$1,000 per core, making a typical 96-way system "on the order of \$90,000, with a healthy amount of memory," he says.

This very dense, on-demand processing could be attractive for companies that want to create

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Location: Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, Chicago, Illinois

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capacity for the unpredictable demands of an SOA without having to keep conventional servers on standby, says Vernon Turner, an analyst at research firm IDC. "The Azul box is based on a very dense, multicore [architecture] built into a very small form factor," he says. While mainstream blade servers can run two- to four-processor cores in a single processor socket, Azul runs 16 per socket, says Turner.

— Robert L. Scheler



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