

10 virtualisation vendors to watch

■ KEVIN FOGARTY

If 2008 was the year vendors turned the virtualisation market into competitive chaos, then 2009 was the year end-user companies moved en masse beyond test beds and into half-scale production.

Executives at enterprises who see the potential benefits of widespread virtualisation of their servers have already picked the low-hanging fruit-replacing test-and-development lab servers with virtual machines, consolidating departmental servers on VMs and virtualising non-critical servers within the datacentre, senior director of marketing for EMC's lonix services division, Bob Quillin, said.

"Companies get to 20 per cent or 30 per cent virtualised and then slow down," he said. "Once you get the test/dev, tier-2 and tier-3 apps virtualised, there are a lot of challenges about how to virtualise tier-1 apps."

lonix and VMware are working on services and management software to improve those things, but Citrix Systems and Microsoft think the problem isn't visibility – it's recoverability, according to Biki Malik, senior director of product marketing at Citrix.

Customers, of course, worry about both types of control and recovery, and most don't have nearly the range of tools they need to feel comfortable with the number and variety of applications they're hoping to virtualise, according to infrastructure and enterprise computing analyst at Illuminata, Gordon Haff.

"The big guys – VMware, Microsoft, Citrix – are all moving pretty quickly, so they're clearly on the list of companies to keep an eye on," Haff said. "The foundation stuff is primarily their domain. But beyond that, in things like compliance, I/O virtualisation, security, stuff like KVM management, some of the smaller guys are pretty interesting."

Here are 10 virtualisation tools companies to watch in 2010:

1 VKernel

When you're talking about a capacity analyser, a tool that takes inventory of your servers and computing resources and figures out how many applications of a given size you can run, it's not that revolutionary an idea. In the virtual world, however, capacity management is something of a black art.

VKernel's product works on both VMware and Microsoft's Hyper-V. Without detailed capacity planning based on real data – not imagination – large-scale virtualisation of production systems is not practical, according to The Burton Group analyst, Chris Wolf.

2 Hyper9

Hyper9 broadly promises to help customers "achieve higher virtualisation management maturity to meet more sophisticated business requirements". Look into the details, though, and the benefits become more clear, Bowker said. Hyper9's Virtual Environment Optimization keeps track of workloads and virtual machines, categorising them by geography, business unit or other criteria, and then reports on both performance levels and resource utilisation.

3 DynamicOps

The DynamicOps technology was born at Credit Suisse as a Web-based mechanism to let business units provision their own virtual resources, with built-in limits on the amount of resources they could demand and end-of-life requirements, too. Because the workflow behind the portal isn't tied to one vendor, it's not difficult to tweak to cover desktop VMs as well as servers. The commercial version promises quicker deployment of VMs, standardised images and access limits, and configuration and behaviour tracking of each VM.

4 Embotics

Embotics focuses on limiting VM sprawl. The company's V-Commander runs the same kind of discovery and inventory management scans that physical network managers rely on, and allows users to create policies that treat provisioning as a lifecycle issue rather than a one-time event. It is designed to monitor VMs, classify them according to groups affected by different policies and automate their consolidation or recycling. The product works with VMware, Microsoft and Citrix VMs, and feeds data to third-party systems-management tools.

5 HyTrust

HyTrust won Best of Show and a Gold Award for security and virtualisation at VMworld 2009 for the HyTrust Appliance, which is designed to create a single point of control for virtual infrastructures including access, policy-based management, security and compliance. Because its management-policy abilities are object-based, HyTrust policies integrate with existing management structures, network and storage systems, using standard protocols. HyTrust also has the ability to get as granular as administrators want controlling user access, application performance and IP address use, as well as providing heavy duty audits of objects.

6 Catbird

Catbird, a direct competitor of HyTrust, also won awards at VMworld for VM security apps that range from policy compliance to network access to security assessment to securing cloud-computing links. Its capabilities are built

on the Catbird V-Agent, a software-based security agent that can run as a virtual machine or within a virtual machine, keeping track of a VM's activity, tracking communication between the VM and its host, and streaming data to a central control portal.

7 Netuitive

Netuitive focuses on making performance management simpler by automating the process of setting performance thresholds and baselines, eliminating many of the false-positive alarms network managers spend their days chasing. The basis of that automation is an analysis engine called the Netuitive Service Analyzer, which monitors the behaviour of both physical and virtual machines and creates a set of baselines it defines as "normal". Once those are set, Netuitive intercepts and analyses alarms, sending its own alerts to administrators only when "normal" (rather than optimal performance) levels fall. Many larger, more mainstream systems management vendors are also adding similar physical and virtual capabilities as well, making that "normal" part of the management market far more crowded.

8 Liquidware Labs

Making desktop virtualisation more mainstream in practice will depend on how well vendors emulate the performance and capabilities of standalone PCs, according to Enterprise Management Associates analyst, Andi Mann. Liquidware Labs' Profile Unity is designed to do exactly that, allowing individual users to create and store – on a server – profiles, configuration settings and documents so they can get the same "desktop" every time they log in to the company's virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI). The profile management system also monitors activity of the virtual desktops for compliance reporting, security and service-level monitoring, and does capacity assessments of existing desktops.

9 AppSense

AppSense, a direct competitor to Liquidware Labs, also focuses on user profiles, referring to its configuration storage and management system as a way to let users keep "personality" with their virtual desktops. Both companies promise quicker, more consistent provisioning and better customisation. AppSense focuses more on user environment and responsiveness, storing user data where it can be most quickly retrieved to reduce login times, and promising to add not only the ability to store documents on the server but also, sometime later this year, applications.

10 RingCube

Another potential player in desktop virtualisation is RingCube, whose vDesk Virtual Desktop Solution and RingCube Workspace Virtualisation Engine offer what Wolf calls a cost-effective alternative to traditional desktop virtualisation. It is complementary to existing plans, or for organisations that need to address immediate needs while waiting on further maturity and more competitive pricing from VMware and Citri, he said. ■

