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IBM's eXtreme Approach to BI, Data Streaming

By Tim Scannell

BOSTON -- In business, actions speak louder than data.

You can also add more clout to that shout by slicing and dicing that data on the fly and quickly serving it up to the people when and where they need it the most.

Throw in a little contextual seasoning and you basically have the recipe for IBM's evolving Business Event Processing (BEP) strategy, a major focus of the company's software group that generates some 40% of Big Blue's total profits.

This week, IBM (NYSE: IBM) added more spice to that formula by unveiling a range of products and services at an event here, designed to leverage the company's current BEP investments, as well as in Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), virtualization and Web 2.0 software. The new 'xTreme' entries also target 'high event volume' customers like Merrill Lynch, the national Bank of Canada and even the U.S. Government that have an interest in spotting the actionable trends behind the transactions.

"From a business perspective, there is less concern about tracking lots of events than there is about seeing things happening in a relatively short period of time," Steve Mills, senior vice president and group executive for IBM's \$20B software group, told InternetNews.com. Executives want to know "what is relative and what is important."

More than 60% of the CEOs of leading companies would seem to agree, saying that faster access to information and better ways to manage it are a top priority within their organizations, according to a recent IBM survey.

The challenge is to keep pace with the 'micro changes' that impact the ebb and flow of massive amounts of data, and not sweating the macro stuff, said Ambuj Goyal, a general manager with IBM Information Management.

"It is very much a real-time model of computing, as you analyze information on the fly and understand and trigger some form of action against that information," added Mills.

At TD Securities, for example, this means keeping tabs and making financial sense out of up to 2 million messages per second, said David Panko, managing director of the investment arm of the TD Bank Financial Group.

A beefed up WebSphere

The new products and services announced by IBM include a beefed up version of WebSphere Business Events v6.2 that includes more tools to manage business events, better integration with IBM Business Process Management (BPM) software, and Linux support. Also new, a pumped up version of IBM's Websphere software called Business Events eXtreme Scale v6.2, which offers a real-time information and event correlation capability and can process huge amounts of raw data.

The company also added support for CICS, an almost 40-year old data management software product that provides a way for nearly 3,000 to channel their data into the WebSphere Business Event Processing stream.

All of these products will be officially announced next month and available before the end of this year, said Tom Rosamilia, general manager of IBM's Websphere division.

IBM presently claims to have roughly 3,770 Business Event Processing customers worldwide, although analysts questioned just how many of those were more involved in the company's SOA or WebSphere business units. The lines separating these areas will blur as BEP gains more ground and gets a tighter grip on enterprise IT services, countered IBM's Mills.

BEP as an industry is expected to grow from about \$1.1B in revenues last year to \$2.6B or more by 2012, according to Credit Suisse, which also credits IBM with a 63.8 current market share.

The U.S. government is one early user of the latest eXtreme version of WebSphere Business Events, although it does not fit the typical customer profile with its 100 Terabyte file appetite. The government took delivery this summer for IBM's first 20,000-processor petaflop system.

ActiveCare Network, a healthcare services company, is more the rule when it comes to the need to manage massive amounts of data and complex events, in this case coordinating biological services to more than two million customers.

The company tracks the availability and schedules of more than clinics and treatment centers and uses IBM BEP systems to juggle hundreds of events and variables to schedule appointments. As a result, patient treatment costs are reduced by as much as 90 percent, noted CIO Tom Brady.