

INSIDER WEEKLY

For iSeries and AS/400 Managers

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- Disney finds the magic in modernization

Vision Solutions acquires Lakeview Technology

Months after purchasing iTera, Vision Solutions has gobbled up another major competitor in the High Availability (HA) space by buying Lakeview Technology for an undisclosed sum.

“Lakeview has built a strong worldwide High Availability business, and we are excited to have its world-class employees, customers, and partners join the Vision family,” says Nicolaas Vlok, CEO, Vision Solutions, Irvine, CA.

As with the iTera purchase, Vision relied on the backing of private equity firm Thoma Cressey Bravo to complete the acquisition of Lakeview ([IW 11/20/06](#)).

Vision is now the world’s largest System i HA vendor, with a customer base of nearly 6,000 companies. Lakeview has 12,000 active licenses in 2,000 different companies.

Vlok says Vision acquired Lakeview in part to capitalize on the latter’s strength in the US market. Vision has a large European presence and can now take advantage of the established infrastructure and distribution capabilities Lakeview built since its founding in 1992.

“It’s also the employee base that came across, and the talent pool that is now

available to us to come up with best ideas and to stay on the leading edge,” says Vlok.

As was the case with the iTera acquisition, Vision says it intends to continue to develop and sell Lakeview’s primary product line, MIMIX. Lakeview customers, he says, should expect a continuation of the same product and customer experience.

“Not a whole lot is going to change for them. We’ll be combining our customer-facing operations, but we’ll be keeping resources in place for customers to have immediate access to what they need. The MIMIX product is not going to go away. It’s going to be supported and enhanced the same as it always has been,” says Vlok.

Vlok says customers will benefit from the merger because they will be presented with a wider range of solutions. MIMIX customers can readily access other Vision products, such as Data Manager and Migrate While Active.

One analyst says the acquisition will dramatically affect the marketplace for HA on the System i.

“Businesses of all sizes are increasingly looking to implement business resiliency solutions that are innovative, affordable, and easy to use. With this market-changing acquisition, Vision Solutions will be uniquely positioned to globally provide small and medium businesses with the best resiliency solutions that are specifically tailored for their needs,” says Sonia Lelii, storage research analyst, Aberdeen Group, Boston, MA.

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While Vision is now clearly dominant in the North American System i market, Vlok says that from a global perspective there's no clear leader. Companies like DataMirror still present formidable opposition on the world stage.

"I don't think the landscape has really changed all that much. This is no time for us to sit back and get comfortable. It's time for us to pick up the pace and get going," he says.

For more on Vision Solutions, go to www.visionsolutions.com.

IBM expands System i VoIP family with Nortel deal

IBM announced this week that it would increase options for System i-based Voice over IP (VoIP) solutions by collaborating with Nortel on a telephony-based unified communications product.

"We're really excited about this. This is a great partnership with a company that IBM has had an alliance with for over a decade. I'm excited that the System i can be a key piece of that alliance. Both IBM and Nortel have recognized the need for integrated collaboration of voice applications and core business applications," says Jim Herring, director of System i products and business operations, IBM, Rochester, MN.

Like the 3Com/IBM System i IP Telephony Suite, first announced in October 2006, the Nortel-IBM System i Unified Communications solution will run on a Linux partition and provide integration between telephony and other business communications applications (*IW 10/2/06*).

The solution is Nortel's first all-software implementation of IP telephony capabilities. The solution will be integrated with Lotus Sametime to offer collaboration tools such as instant messaging, Web conferencing,

Last-minute tax maneuver saves IBM billions

According to published reports in the Wall Street Journal, IBM saved \$1.6 billion in taxes last month by structuring a massive stock repurchase arrangement before the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) changed its policy on foreign earnings.

The \$12.5 billion stock repurchase was completed just days before the IRS began requiring US companies to pay US taxes on stock repurchases.

The new tax rules went into effect on May 31.

and click-to-call capabilities.

The solution will also be able to integrate with IBM Lotus Notes and Microsoft Outlook.

Herring says he envisions System i shops finding their own ways to maximize the advantages of digital voice systems.

"Ten or 12 years ago everybody got email. Then people figured out how to weave email into their business applications, and we got workflow. I think the next step is that people are going to figure out how to weave voice into their business applications," he says.

One of the major differences between the Nortel solution and the 3Com solution is ease of deployment. Herring says small to medium businesses (SMB) should find it easy to install and administer the Nortel solution.

For example, the solution allows administrators to design templates that allow employees to customize their own phone functions via the Web. Those Web templates can be tailored to grant certain authorities to certain people.

"It really is, from a deployment perspective, easy and simple. You can really tailor the administration aspects of this [solution]," says Herring.

While the solution is targeted largely at smaller businesses, Herring says the solution can scale up to a System i Model

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595 if shops of that size opt for the Nortel solution.

IBM and Nortel have yet to iron out the specifics of how the solution will be sold. Herring says it could be as simple as a download CD for existing System i customers or could be bundled as a solution edition of a System i server.

The solution is slated to be available in Q4 2007. Pricing has yet to be determined.

For more on the Nortel-IBM System i Unified Communications solution, visit www.nortel.com.

Modern Mouse: Disney finds the magic by updating RPG application

The Resort Operations department of Walt Disney World had a problem. The RPG-based guest check-in application that runs the business at its hotels was saddled with a cumbersome green-screen interface that forced employees — or “cast members,” as Disney prefers to call them — to memorize dozens of commands just to help guests check in or out.

“We’ve been using an application with a lot of function keys that had to be memorized. Walt Disney World has a lot of resorts and a lot of turnover, and the people using the application had to go through one week of technological training plus three weeks of on-the-job training. We found that a lot of people were dropping out of the training during the first week,” says Paul Simons, manager, Front Office Operations, Walt Disney World, Orlando, FL.

All that training on the application left little time for Disney, which puts a premium on guest interaction, to train its employees to meet its stringent guest relations standards.

The first idea Resort Operations employees had was to replace the entire property management system with an application that could run the same business logic with a more user-friendly interface.

Unable to find one — and without time or means to spend years writing a brand new system from scratch — they settled on a multi-phased approach wherein they would replace the front end of the application with a dynamic graphical interface and replace the back end of the application later.

Disney found its solution by working with Human Factors International (HFI), a usability and design consulting firm, and System i application modernization firm Profound Logic Software, Inc.

HFI helped Disney design a simple, attractive graphical interface aimed at making the check-in process intuitive for Disney employees. Disney then sent its design to Profound Logic, which coded the interface to plug into the existing RPG business logic within the application.

“It wasn’t feasible to create this as a stand-alone application, so we just took advantage of the legacy logic. The program is actually calling the same processes that were part of the legacy system. The good thing is that it was very stable and worked for years,” says David Russo, project manager, Profound Logic, Dayton, OH.

The new interface was designed completely in RPG, making heavy use of Asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX).

The end result is a slick, six-screen GUI check-in process that gives front desk employees the ability to check guests in with a few simple scrolls and clicks. Disney representatives say the new process has reduced check-in time by about 25% and reduced training to five days. Most importantly, it has led to greater personal

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interaction between guests and front desk employees, who are no longer glued to their green screens throughout the process.

“With the user interface, it’s less about the technology than interaction with guests. Some people save up for years to come here. They fly all day, and then they take the bus here. The last thing we want is for their check-in to be slow,” says Judith Kirby, senior analyst, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts IT Communications, Orlando, FL.

For its efforts, Disney was awarded an IBM System i Innovation Award at the 2007 Annual COMMON Conference in Anaheim, CA.

“It’s nice to be recognized for your work. Here we are being recognized by IBM, but we’re really just a hotel and entertainment company working on business problems. My senior VP wondered why we hadn’t done this four years ago,” says Simons.

For more on Profound Logic, go to www.profoundlogic.com. For more on Walt Disney World resorts, go to www.disneyworld.com.

Insider update...

- IBM has released a new Redbook to help System i managers integrate their servers into a TCP/IP network. The Redbook, titled “IBM i5/OS IP Networks: Dynamic,” is only available in hard copy. More information is available at www.redbooks.ibm.com/abstracts/sg246718.html.

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Editor • Davin Wilfrid
Copy Editor • Suzanne Daly
Production Manager • Randi Swartz
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Want to express your opinion?
Call Editor Davin Wilfrid at **781-751-8683**
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Insider Weekly for iSeries and AS/400 Managers,
c/o iSeries 400 Experts, 11300 Rockville Pike, Suite 1100,
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