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IBM Enlarges Sphere of Influence in the Cloud



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IBM is moving deeper into the cloud, and its relentless march could make it difficult for any competitor to gain purchase, despite the newness of the space. On Monday, Big Blue debuted a new cloud service dubbed "Bluehouse," which facilitates social networking and collaboration among different organizations.

IBM's (NYSE: IBM) considerable footprint in the cloud computing space is growing larger. The company has announced an expansion of its ISV (independent software vendor) partner network; it has also launched a beta version of [Bluehouse](#) -- a social networking and collaboration cloud service designed to connect people from different businesses.

Big Blue took the opportunity of these two developments to define its rapidly growing cloud computing offerings to the market, which has watched almost in awe as the company has introduced initiative after initiative over the past several months.

IBM breaks its extensive offerings into four categories: 1) its own cloud services portfolio; 2) services to help ISVs design, build, deliver and market their own cloud services; 3) integration services for companies that wish to weave these technologies into their existing IT infrastructure; and 4) providing cloud computing environments to businesses.

It is an ambitious undertaking, acknowledged Dave Mitchell, director of strategy for IBM developer relations. "There are many linkages among these four areas," he told the E-Commerce Times -- "linkages that will only continue to develop and expand as the market itself grows."

New Line-Up

Bluehouse is one of several new technologies that IBM is deploying to improve the delivery of cloud services, said Mitchell. To be sure, the company's cloud-building portfolio touches on

many areas of the enterprise, including offerings in server, storage and network virtualization; service management applications to automate workload management; usage-tracking and billing; and a range of security and resiliency offerings.

The latest cloud service areas fall under the company's Tivoli portfolio. These include Bluehouse, which combines social networking and online collaboration tools that are unhampered by firewalls or organizational boundaries. A suite of hosted online technologies, Bluehouse allows users to share documents and contacts; engage in joint project activities; host online meetings; and build social networking communities.

Another new offering, Lotus [Sametime Unyte](#), arranges Web conferences that allow the sharing of documents, presentations or applications through any Web connection. Enhancements to Sametime Unyte include multilanguage support and faster network performance. It also offers a "waiting room" for meeting participants to gather and provides specialized alerts and prompts for meeting hosts.

IBM plans to integrate Sametime Unyte with Lotus Notes and Lotus Sametime, so people working in e-mail or instant messaging can join the Web conferences.

Yet another new application is Telelogic Focal Point, which centralizes the product information shared by product management, engineering, marketing and other stakeholders.

IBM is also introducing a number of new security-related plays, including Remote Data Protection; IBM Rational Policy Tester OnDemand, which automates Web-content scanning to isolate privacy, quality and accessibility compliance issues; and IBM Rational AppScan OnDemand, which scans Web applications for bugs.

Too Ambitious?


IBM's burgeoning ISV partner program is another key piece to this strategy, Mitchell said. "We have added 100 partners and are on track to double the number this year."

Perhaps more telling is that most of the company's new partners focus on middleware and hardware rather than hosting, he said.

That shift is attributable to IBM's emphasis on technical blueprints, said Mitchell, among other factors.

Given the nascence of the cloud computing market -- at least compared to the solidly established enterprise software space -- IBM entrenchment could be viewed as game-over to any competing interests. However, it's questionable whether Big Blue cannot handle -- or handle well, at least -- every aspect of the market.

"IBM is adopting a broader strategy than most of the providers right now, including Amazon and Google," Shane Aubel, cofounder and partner in [Accent Global System Architects](#), told the E-Commerce Times.

"Right now, everybody is trying to define what the space is and its boundaries -- but my gut reaction is that IBM is going to have to scale back at some point," remarked Aibel. 

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