

Citrix Synergy 2009 Announcements – Real Benefits Despite The Gloss

Abstract

At its Synergy 2009 user conference, Citrix Systems, Inc. (NASDAQ:CTXS) announced and demonstrated several recent, new, and future products and strategies. These covered all of the major products in its Citrix Delivery Center product family, including XenApp (application virtualization), XenDesktop (desktop virtualization), XenServer (server virtualization, cloud computing), NetScaler (Web application acceleration), and Citrix Cloud Center or “C3” (Citrix’s cloud computing initiative). They included new application delivery products (Citrix Dazzle, Citrix Receiver, NetScaler VPX), new client-hosted desktop virtualization (Citrix XenClient bare-metal hypervisor), new delivery technologies (Citrix HDX, App Viewer), new product upgrades (XenServer, Essentials for XenServer and Hyper-V, Citrix C3), new partnership initiatives (Citrix C3 with Amazon EC2 and Amazon S3), and a new license model.

Many of these products were promoted as solutions to questionable trends – like the imperative to adopt consumer trends in enterprise IT, and an impending tsunami of cloud computing – but also deliver significant real enhancements for enterprises and end users.

Performance, security, deployment, and manageability improvements will make application delivery less expensive and improve productivity. New virtualization features will help enterprise IT to evolve into their own internal cloud providers, providing dynamic, agile, cost-efficient, utility computing infrastructures.

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Despite the superficial gloss, competitors – especially VMware, but also Symantec, Sun (Oracle), Quest, IBM, Parallels, Virtual Computer, Neocleus, moka5,

Endavors, InstallFree, and others – will need to track these developments, and customers that dig beneath the marketing spin will find significant enterprise IT value in these announcements.

Citrix Synergy 2009

On May 4-6, 2009, at its Synergy 2009 user conference, Citrix Systems Inc. (CTXS) made a number of announcements regarding recent, new, and future products and strategies. These announcements covered all of its key application delivery business areas, including XenApp (application virtualization), XenDesktop (desktop virtualization), XenServer (server virtualization, cloud computing), and NetScaler (Web application acceleration). It also announced a new licensing scheme for enterprises.

Key Announcements

Key announcements and demonstrations in application and desktop delivery at Synergy included:

- Citrix Dazzle – a self-service ‘storefront’ portal that provides a front-end to existing Citrix Delivery Center head-end products to give corporate users on-demand access to enterprise applications and infrastructure, modeled on consumer applications like DirecTV or Apple iTunes. Citrix Merchandising Server will provide a backend to ‘advertise’ available XenDesktop, XenApp, and XenServer services; Workflow Studio will provide automation for routing, approval, and delivery. Citrix Merchandising Server is free and available immediately. Dazzle (for Windows and Mac) will be free, with general availability due later in 2009.
- Citrix Receiver – a client-based agent that provides ‘on-demand’ access to XenApp applications and XenDesktop desktops. Receiver supports Windows, Mac, iPhone, and iPod Touch, with versions for other smart phone devices, including Windows Mobile, Symbian and Android in development. Receiver is free and available immediately.
- Citrix HDX – short for ‘High-Definition eXperience’, a new set of technologies in Citrix Receiver that provide high-performance for 3D graphics, streaming media, etc. to accelerate mobile application performance, offline applications, voice, and multimedia for virtual applications and desktops.
- App Viewer – as part of Citrix Receiver for the iPhone and iPod Touch, App Viewer is a new technology that can be used to create mobile-friendly views of enterprise applications (ERP, CRM, etc.)

Key announcements and demonstrations in data center and cloud at Synergy included:

- Citrix XenClient – a client-hosted hypervisor being developed in collaboration with Intel that allows multiple independent desktop operating systems to run on bare metal hardware. XenClient will be available for free in the second half of 2009, with initial support for PC hardware, and possibly Apple Mac (which was also demonstrated).
- NetScaler VPX – a new software-based ‘virtual appliance’ version of the NetScaler MPX hardware appliance, to provide acceleration, security and availability for delivering Web applications, without the restrictions of a full hardware appliance.
- Expanded C3 Platform Program – new offerings for the Citrix Cloud Center, or Citrix C3, including pre-built XenApp and XenDesktop capabilities for service providers to deliver Windows applications and desktops as services; a new Citrix Service Provider (CSP) program with usage-based pricing; and Citrix C3 Cloud Blueprints, a set of best practice guidelines for testing virtualization, security and application services in a cloud environment
- Citrix C3 Lab – a new offering based on Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2), Amazon Simple Storage Service (S3), and Citrix C3, that provides access to preconfigured Citrix virtualization environments including Citrix XenApp, Citrix Access Gateway, and Citrix Branch Repeater, allowing IT professionals to test and QA their existing applications in a cloud infrastructure. C3 Lab will use utility-based pricing, and is available immediately.

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- Citrix Essentials 5.5 for XenServer and Hyper-V – a new release of the company’s advanced virtualization management solution for both hypervisors, featuring enhancements such as expanded storage integration, automated stage management, and dynamic workload balancing
- Citrix XenServer 5.5 – a new release of their enterprise-class server virtualization platform with enhancements including new consolidated backup, enhanced V-to-V conversion and VM search, Active Directory integration, and support for SLES 11, Debian 5.0, and RedHat/CentOS/Oracle 5.3. XenServer 5.5, which also includes full multi-server management, live motion and support of all Windows and Linux VMs, is free of charge for unlimited production use. The new version will be available in June.

Citrix also announced new Enterprise License Agreements (ELAs) to give customers an ‘all you can eat’ option for software purchasing, with a set price for any combination of eligible products and services in the Citrix Delivery Center product family. Concurrently, Citrix also made XenDesktop Feature Pack 1 available for download with upgrades to media streaming, softphone compatibility, smartcard integration enhancements, and support for Windows 7 beta.

EMA Perspective

These announcements reaffirm Citrix’s place as a leader in virtualization, cloud computing, and application delivery – but it takes some digging to get at the real value they present.

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Many of these new capabilities (and the keynotes where they were announced) show Citrix taking a strong position on the so-called ‘consumerization’ of IT – a notion that ‘Web 2.0’ and consumer technologies like iTunes, DirecTV, Google, Amazon, etc. will fundamentally change the way enterprises deliver technologies internally. This is not necessarily a bad idea in principle – indeed, making technology

more easily consumed by non-technical users will make technology more productive – but the antecedents of this consumerization argument are unconvincing.

However, to focus on this misalignment is to miss what Citrix is really achieving. Dazzle is just icing on the cake, but HDX, Receiver, XenClient, and NetScaler VPX are providing enterprise technology that will deliver performance, security, deployment, and manageability improvements. This makes application delivery less expensive, and improves end-user productivity. The C3 enhancements provide marginal utility for some edge use cases, but enhancements to XenServer and Essentials move closer to allowing enterprise IT to be their own cloud providers. This will provide dynamic, agile, service-based computing that aligns to business needs. Enterprise IT should therefore look past the superficial consumerization message, and see that Citrix is continuing to make application delivery and management cheaper, easier, faster, and less complex.

Competitors will need to dig into these announcements as well. VMware especially should note Citrix’s rear-guard action in encouraging external cloud development with Xen, as this may establish a beachhead for the more critical (and realistic) internal cloud market. Large virtualization vendors like Symantec, Sun (Oracle), Quest, IBM, and Parallels will

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need to deliver better end-to-end solutions. Niche vendors like Virtual Computer, Neocleus, moka5, Endeavors, and InstallFree need to establish their unique values, especially with agile and heterogeneous developments that integrate widely and eschew lock-in.

Yet the solutions announced and shown at Synergy are far from perfect. NetScaler VPX suffers from the flaws of all virtual appliances (especially compatibility and management); XenClient is not yet available and little was revealed about needed manageability features; C3 promotes cloud computing, but despite the new announcements, Citrix has not added anything to address security, compliance, performance, and service level issues. So Citrix still has much to do, especially in enhancing management integration. It would have been better advised to plug XenApp into Tivoli, LANDesk, BMC, or Novell (for example) management tools than into the iPhone; and Dazzle would have benefited more from a real Service Catalog and/or CMDB interface, rather than an animated graphical interface.

Nevertheless, in an IT world where challenges of virtualization, mobility, agility, cost efficiency, and productivity are ever increasing, Citrix is providing real solutions with real value, describing a compelling vision of client virtualization, and establishing strong momentum in virtualization and application delivery.

About EMA

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