

BIG DOLLARS IN POWER MANAGEMENT

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By Michael Vizard

All the current talk about conserving energy could translate to business opportunities for solution providers.

Everywhere you go these days, people are talking about the cost of energy. In the context of IT, that usually translates into the cost of electricity needed to power data centers and the amount of watts wasted by people leaving everything from PCs to printers on 24 hours a day.

As always, wherever there is customer pain, there is a strategic opportunity for solution providers. In particular, concerns about lowering the amount of energy consumed by a corporation either as part of an attempt to save money or to be more environmentally conscious are creating a need for managed services around power management.

Perhaps the best example of a vendor moving quickly into this space is BigFix, which markets a system and security management tool suite. BigFix recently added a power management module that customers such as the Miami-Dade County Public Schools system are using. The school district saves \$2 million a year by using BigFix to remotely turn off more than 11,000 endpoints on its network. Given what we know about kids not turning off the lights at home, you can imagine the amount of money schools across the nation could save.

Of course, the same theory applies to data centers that consume unbelievable amounts of energy. Any number of power management products are available from companies such as APC, but few solution providers have developed a managed service around power management in the data center. In these uncertain economic times, you can bet your bottom dollar IT customers are keenly interested in how to save power costs to protect IT budgets threatened with cutbacks.

And even though we know that more energy-efficient systems are coming down the pike and that Microsoft has pledged to reduce by an unspecified date the wattage its software consumes by a factor of five, it will take the better part of a decade to refresh all the energy-inefficient systems in use today.

All in all, this means the need to save money on energy costs is not likely to drop any time soon as the weak dollar continues to push the price of oil higher and higher. But just in case saving money on electricity isn't enough of a motivator, there's always the green computing goal.

Government agencies across the country are to one degree or another getting ready to turn various guidelines and tax breaks into more stringent legislative requirements that will actually measure how much carbon companies are dumping into the environment. With those regulations come limits that companies cannot exceed, and saving energy will be directly coupled to environmental regulations.

This trend, according to IBM and Enterprise Information Management, should result in the creation of a worldwide carbon exchange allowing companies with low carbon emissions to effectively sell carbon credits to other companies that are over their limit. To that end, IBM has been working with EIM on a platform for trading carbon credits using IBM's WebSphere and FileNet software to create a carbon-trading portal that will link customers to a global carbon exchange.

What all this means is that power management is about to become a very big business for the channel, and chances are that if you're not in the game now, you'll be missing one of the bigger opportunities of the decade.

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