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Virtualisation heads for the big time

Experts claim technology has reached maturity

Robert Jaques at NetEvents in Evian, vnunet.com 22 Feb 2007

Enterprises of all sizes should not dismiss virtualisation as too complex, as the technology has now reached a level of maturity that makes it ready for the computing mainstream, industry experts advised today.

Camille Mender, vice president of enterprise research at Yankee Group, told delegates at NetEvents in Evian that virtualisation has come of age.

"Virtualisation is not just for the academic environments and not just about supercomputers. It affects every large enterprise, small enterprise and even individuals. However, it is old wine in new bottles as it is not a new idea," he said.

"The virtualisation investment starts in the server space. A survey last year showed that a significant percentage of the enterprise landscape of both large and small organisations are making significant investment in virtualisation."

Mender noted that the main reasons for this increased interest in virtualisation, which allows multiple discrete computing environments to be run on single CPUs, are reductions in infrastructure costs, consolidation of server space and concerns over power utilisation.

"It is really about optimising server space. And the good news is that, of those who have made investment, a significant number report rapid return on investment," she said.

"But it depends on which firms choose to partner for investment and we have heard of some failures."

For those organisations considering jumping on the virtualisation bandwagon, Mender describes VMware as the "clear market leader".

But that analyst said that there is another "elephant in the room" in the form of Microsoft, which is likely to shake up the market.

Steve Broadhead, director of Broadband-Testing Labs, said: "Nowadays any enterprise can undertake this as a project."

However, he added that such projects need to be undertaken carefully. "There are many potential problems with things that can go wrong," he warned.

"With mainstream software and a mainstream OS things tend to work. But go for a more obscure offering and you are more likely to experience difficulties."

Mendler added: "There are some problems including relatively immature virtual machines and management complexity. Virtualisation posits simplicity but can actually be complex to set up and manage.

"Step one is to audit what applications you have in place today because you have to manage the legacy. Political issues in the organisation need to be addressed. In many ways virtualisation is less of a technology issue and more of an organisational political issue."

Paul Di Leo, chief executive at Zeus Technology, believes that virtualisation represents a potentially valuable new delivery model for software vendors and ISVs.

"It is very simple to use and deploy, but it does have its challenges," he said. "From our customers' perspectives deploying virtualisation can save money in server infrastructure, training costs of other back end applications."

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