



Instant Insight
September 18, 2008

Citrix Announces XenServer 5

By Clay Ryder

Citrix Systems has announced Citrix XenServer 5, the latest version of its server virtualization product line that is powered by the Xen hypervisor, and a key component of the Citrix Delivery Center product family, a comprehensive datacenter-to-desktop system that targets organizations wishing to transform their traditional static datacenters into dynamic “delivery centers.” This latest offering adds 100+ virtualization management features including what the company states utilizes the industry’s most advanced High Availability, auto-restart, failover, and disaster recovery technologies that can be upgraded to full fault tolerance for the most mission-critical applications. This is achieved in part by XenServer’s distributed management architecture, support for replication and remote mirroring architectures, and built-in replication for virtual machine metadata information to provide easy and reliable virtual machine and application recovery for site failure scenarios. According to Citrix, XenServer 5 is the first server virtualization platform to be validated for both AMD and Intel 32-bit and 64-bit systems through Microsoft’s Server Virtualization Validated Program, which validates vendor’s virtualization software to run Windows Server 2008 and previous versions.

XenServer 5 features an open architecture that helps organizations leverage their existing storage and datacenter management investments. The open storage APIs allow organizations to access directly from within the XenServer management console advanced functions such as snapshotting, cloning, replication, de-duplication and provisioning in storage systems from vendors including EqualLogic and NetApp. The XenServer 5 management console supports most storage environments including NAS, DAS, and SAN implemented through fiber channel and iSCSI as well as support for 8GB HBAs from QLogic and Emulex.

XenServer 5 includes new configuration wizards, intuitive interfaces, and easy point-and-click conversion of physical servers into virtual machines. New enhancements include a Web 2.0-style tagging and searching capability which allows IT professionals to track and locate virtual machines through powerful searching and sorting capabilities based on application type, QoS requirements, department, cost center, location, etc. There are also enhanced performance monitoring, reporting, and alerting dashboards that assist IT professionals through realtime and historical views of virtual machines and physical host performance.

Pricing and Availability

Citrix XenServer 5 is available immediately through Citrix’s worldwide network of Solutions Advisors and channel partners. XenServer 5 pricing begins with a SRP of \$900/server, and there are no additional CPU or socket fees. Pricing includes XenCenter management technologies and a one-year Citrix Subscription Advantage membership. XenServer Express, a production-ready, single-server version of XenServer with unlimited virtual machine and memory support capabilities, is also available for free download at www.citrix.com.

Net/Net

This announcement is interesting as it represents more than just the latest version of a virtualization offering; it illustrates the potential for transforming application delivery environment that we posited last year when Citrix acquired XenSource. With XenServer 5, Citrix has signaled its desire to achieve a more strategic

position in its customers' datacenters by delivering a solution that potentially will allow organizations to fundamentally transform how they view their datacenters. Despite the considerable marketplace infatuation with virtualization, for the most part it remains viewed in a rather narrow fashion focused on simply reducing the number of servers supporting an organization's workloads. Although the stereotype has progressed beyond that of generic white-box x86 servers running Linux, the reality is that most organizations are barely making their first steps towards a strategic virtualization path, one that would transform legacy data centers from static bastions of siloed applications and information into a dynamic, flexible, and much simpler application delivery infrastructure.

The acquisition of XenSource by Citrix was much more than a land grab for ownership of virtualization hypervisor. The combination of Citrix's existing technology and the virtualization potential of XenSource broadens virtualization beyond the relatively simple task of server consolidation to include a much more holistic view of network application delivery and its associated impact on storage, networking, and client consumption devices. In effect, Citrix is offering a new view of the future datacenter. This new view is one in which most all physical aspects of servers, applications, and network functions are largely transcended by a virtual service bureau through which needed IT resources are delivered to users largely without concern as to their physical or even virtual location within the infrastructure. The operational distinction between a physical server and a virtual one has increasingly become cosmetic and there are few reasons why IT professionals who are tasked with application and information delivery should even be concerned.

By building upon its existing live migration resource pooling and workload provisioning capabilities Citrix is seeking to transform assumptions about how datacenters are configured, deployed, and managed. This completely virtual view is one that will potentially yield benefits with respect to space requirements, cooling, energy efficiency, and the requisite IT personnel. The ability of the XenServer Management Console to directly interact with the common storage environments permits organizations to continue using existing data center tools and skill sets just as they have with physical servers. Hence, sophisticated storage technologies should be as easy to access from either physical or virtual servers, without mandating two skill sets to support it. Further, XenServer 5's workload provisioning makes it possible for administrators to boot servers and deliver multiple workloads from a single image to target servers, even servers that lack any local storage or hypervisor. This could be of considerable interest to power constrained data centers or those who are investing in highly consolidated blade-centric server solutions. These storage centric capabilities illustrate how Citrix is looking to provide much more than simple server virtualization in addition to its application delivery technologies.

While this latest release of XenServer will not change its customer's datacenters overnight, it does offer a data center strategy that seeks to remove most dependencies on physical IT attributes and shifts the focus onto applications and information. This increased abstraction of physical elements from applications is well positioned to assist organizations in their quest to deliver dynamic applications to increasing numbers of local and remote users while simultaneously improving the efficiency and cost effectiveness of IT investments. Although there is still much work to be done, the scope of virtualization and application delivery finesse being offered by Citrix places the company in a leading, if not unique, position in the marketplace that bodes well for the company, and more importantly, its customers.