

Sun's Phase-Out of Forte Server May Create Legacy Challenges

Michael J. Blechar

The decommissioning of the Forte C++ fourth-generation language demonstrates Sun Microsystems' Java focus, but IS organizations may face a challenge over what to do with legacy Forte applications.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

Sun recently began informing its customers that it is phasing out support for the Sun ONE Unified Development Server (UDS) product, which includes the Forte C++ fourth-generation language, over the next five years. Sun will fully support the Forte product through September 2006. Between September 2006 and September 2008, Sun will support only the Oracle database management system (DBMS), Solaris/SPARC development and deployment, and Windows for development and client deployment purposes. Thereafter, Sun will support only the Solaris/SPARC platform and Oracle DBMS before ending support of UDS completely in April 2009.

Analysis

Sun believes that "fourth-generation languages have lost the war and Java has won." To its credit, Sun has clearly stated its direction for decommissioning UDS and provides a credible amount of time for continued support of the technology. Still, considering the large number of legacy systems built with the Forte fourth-generation language, enterprises will likely not be able to convert them all to Java or some other solution by the phase-out dates.

Sun will find itself supporting UDS longer than anticipated, although customers can expect Sun to charge a premium for extended support (0.7 probability). Regardless, risk-averse customers should immediately implement a transition strategy that includes a phased retirement plan for some UDS applications, coupled with redesign/rewrite and (semi)automated conversion of others.

Sun plans to increase maintenance costs over the transition period, while offering a 15 percent credit toward professional services to help customers migrate from UDS to Java. Sun will also offer customers free licenses for the enterprise edition of its application server for every UDS license they possess. Thus far, Sun has identified two partners to do the actual conversions, Goldstone Technologies and Agile IT, but is evaluating others and expects the partner list will expand. Goldstone and Agile say they have some reverse-engineering tools to assist in the conversion of Forte fourth-generation code to Java. User-facing code will not be automatically converted, so customers must either redesign their application interfaces for use by a Web browser or go to some other solution supporting client/server interfaces. Goldstone has done two conversions thus far, while Agile has not done any. Therefore, it is premature to estimate the degree to which customers can successfully outsource the conversion effort.

Analytical Source: Michael Blechar, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "SODA Environments Support the Application Platform Suite" — Enterprises seeking an end-to-end composite development solution (as opposed to a piecemeal one) should adopt an integrated service-oriented development of applications environment (ISE) from vendors that have proactively integrated their emerging ISE with an emerging application platform suite stack. **By Daryl Plummer and Mark Driver**
- "SODA Requires People, Process and Paradigm Shifts " — Mainstream IS organizations should have already begun to implement a transition strategy from traditional client/server architectures, methods and tools to those supporting service-oriented development of applications. **By Michael Blechar**

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