

Cisco Intelligent-Network Offering Will Boost Appliance Market

Mark Fabbi, Roy W. Schulte, Massimo Pezzini

Cisco Application-Oriented Networking (AON) embeds many middleware and other functions into the network. The AON launch helps validate the nascent network-appliance market, but success won't be easy for Cisco.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 21 June 2005, Cisco introduced AON, an "intelligent network" message-routing system. AON provides network-embedded functions similar to those found in an enterprise service bus (ESB), such as transformation, content-based routing, encryption, authentication, XML message validation and protocol switching. The first AON products — boards that slot into Cisco data center switches and edge routers — are shipping in "controlled availability" to select customers now, with general availability planned for 4Q05. IBM, SAP and Tibco Software and others are partnering with Cisco to provide AON-related functionality.

Analysis

This and other recent announcements show that Cisco is paying more attention to applications, an area where it has lagged. The AON launch is a validation for what is now a small market for network-embedded devices providing security, transcoding and optimization for XML and other messaging systems.

Such devices advance the Gartner-defined concept of the enterprise nervous system (ENS) — an intelligent network providing value-added functions that elevate the network's role beyond plain communication. The ENS concept was first physically implemented in ESB or integration suite software running on servers. More recently, integration and XML "appliances" have combined the hardware and software in a single, preconfigured product. AON takes this a step further by embedding ENS functions into routers and switches that are managed and addressed as part of the network.

This is a strong move into a small, developing market, but Cisco's success is not assured. Several appliance vendors have been in this market longer, with more mature products. And the move into message processing is a major shift from Cisco's packet-based world. The company must now sell to a new type of buyer that differs from its traditional network manager audience. Cisco clearly recognizes these challenges, however, and has already mustered significant vendor partnerships, a management team of seasoned middleware veterans, and significant sales, engineering, professional-services and support resources for the AON effort.

Recommendations

- **Enterprises with application integration requirements:** Examine the tradeoffs between software- and appliance-based approaches to determine whether an appliance approach is appropriate — and, if so, whether a server- or a network-based appliance approach (such as Cisco's AON) makes the most sense.
- **Risk-averse buyers:** Wait until v.2 before seriously evaluating the AON product, because v.1 will be immature. Leading-edge users may consider v.1. Other XML appliance vendors — such as Cast Iron Systems, DataPower Technology, Reactivity, Sarvega, Solace Systems and Vordel — should also be considered in this nascent market.

Analytical Sources: Mark Fabbi, Roy Schulte and Massimo Pezzini, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Cisco/FineGround Deal Shakes Application Acceleration Market" — Cisco will invigorate the application acceleration market by buying FineGround Networks, whose products are an excellent fit. **By Joe Skorupa and Mark Fabbi**
- "Vendor Rating Update: Cisco Moves to Diversify" — Cisco's future will depend on its ability to grow its revenue beyond its established strongholds and to deliver on the promise of the Intelligent Information Network. **By Mark Fabbi**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Corporate Headquarters

56 Top Gallant Road
Stamford, CT 06902-7700
U.S.A.
+1 203 964 0096

European Headquarters

Tamesis
The Glanty
Egham
Surrey, TW20 9AW
UNITED KINGDOM
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters

Gartner Australasia Pty. Ltd.
Level 9, 141 Walker Street
North Sydney
New South Wales 2060
AUSTRALIA
+61 2 9459 4600

Japan Headquarters

Gartner Japan Ltd.
Aobadai Hills, 6F
7-7, Aobadai, 4-chome
Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042
JAPAN
+81 3 3481 3670

Latin America Headquarters

Gartner do Brazil
Av. das Nações Unidas, 12551
9º andar—World Trade Center
04578-903—São Paulo SP
BRAZIL
+55 11 3443 1509