

IBM Extends Metadata Management With Unicorn Acquisition

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IBM enhances its metadata management capabilities in the areas of metadata repository, data integration and semantic modeling. But multiple repository products and product integration challenges remain to be addressed.

Event

On 8 May 2006, IBM announced the acquisition of Unicorn Solutions to support its data management software portfolio in the area of metadata management.

Analysis

New service-oriented architectures, business process management initiatives and data integration activities require substantially improved metadata management capabilities across both design-time and runtime technologies. Like all leading vendors, IBM has been evolving its support in this area. By acquiring Unicorn, IBM has the potential to significantly extend IBM's metadata management capabilities across its breadth of products. However, there will most likely be only incremental improvements in the next 12 months.

Unicorn leverages semantics and ontologies to assist organizations engaged in enterprise information management activities. It includes an information model — a master model of business entities (formally, an ontology) — to which physical data schemas may be mapped. It supports the World Wide Web Consortium's Ontology Web Language standard, as well as vertical market frameworks and standards such as the Defense Department Architecture Framework (DoDAF); Command, Control, Communications, Computing, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR); Association for Cooperative Operations Research and Development (ACORD); and IBM's Insurance Application Architecture and Information FrameWork.

We expect the Unicorn technology to be used to supplement or enhance the metadata repository capabilities of WebSphere Metadata Server, which includes WebSphere Service Registry and Repository. Unicorn's semantic capabilities could aid all of IBM's data integration capabilities (that is, federation/enterprise information integration, data transformation and replication) by adding semantic modeling.

The IBM acquisition is an extremely positive step for Unicorn customers. Unicorn was relatively small, with only about 20 customers. It offered good technology but lacked the resources to impact the market. Its smaller size should make Unicorn easier for IBM to assimilate than most acquisitions — especially since IBM has been partnering with Unicorn for some time now and its technologies are already somewhat integrated. However, Unicorn touches on many aspects of the IBM product line, including the WebSphere Information Integration product family. Given that IBM has several repository products, it will need a strategy to rationalize them. IBM still has a lot of product integration work to finish within the WebSphere product line, and integration of Unicorn is probably a lower priority than most. Still, we expect IBM customers to achieve greater metadata management advantages from Unicorn's participation in a bridged or federated manner in the short term.

Recommendations

- **Unicorn customers:** Strongly consider continued use of the Unicorn product while IBM develops its product road map plans for it.
- **IBM customers and Unicorn prospects:** Evaluate whether Unicorn's capabilities can be of value in the short term while awaiting more details from IBM. Prospects who cannot wait for more detail on IBM assimilation and integration plans and need a

metadata repository to support service-oriented architectures should consider alternatives from market leaders Allen Systems Group, Flashline and LogicLibrary.

Analytical Sources: Michael Blechar and Ted Friedman, Gartner Research

RECOMMENDED READING

"What Metadata Is and Why You Should Care, 2H05 Through 1H06" — Managing key metadata artifacts is cost-effective and critical to maximize success in service-oriented development of applications and enterprisewide sharing and reuse initiatives. **By Michael Blechar**

"IBM's Data Integration Strategy Takes Shape" — IBM's acquisitions of CrossAccess, Trigo, Venetica, Ascential and DWL, coupled with investments in WebSphere Information Integrator, elevate the company's status as a data integration vendor. **By Andreas Bitterer**

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