

Sun's Low-Priced DW Appliance Seeks to Disrupt Market

Donald Feinberg

Sun Microsystems and Greenplum have joined forces to offer a low-priced data warehouse appliance. If the appliance can handle a mixed DW workload, it could potentially have a disruptive effect in this active market.

Event

On 27 July 2006, Sun Microsystems and Greenplum announced they will offer a data warehouse (DW) appliance that combines the Sun Fire X4500 data server — announced in June 2006 — with Greenplum's massively parallel processing (MPP) database management system (DBMS), Bizgres MPP. The appliance uses Solaris 10, running on standard Opteron hardware, with standard 250- or 500-gigabyte disk drives and Greenplum's MPP DBMS. The system will be configured by usable terabytes of storage and will be priced as low as \$15,000 per terabyte or \$1.5 million for a 100-terabyte system. The DW appliance will be available later in 2006.

Analysis

Sun's new DW appliance — which will be sold and serviced by Sun — is priced well below competing offerings, which gives it the potential to act as a disruptive force within the DW DBMS market. With this appliance, Sun is attempting to strengthen its presence in the software and solutions market segments while increasing the sales of its new X4500 system. However, Sun has much work ahead of it before it can build a DW professional services organization capable of supporting the large potential customer base for this new offering, which is currently a mainstay of NCR Teradata, a leader in the market.

Greenplum's MPP DBMS, which has been shipping since the beginning of 2006, has more than 10 customers on other hardware platforms, including Dell. The Greenplum MPP DBMS is a modified version of the standard open-source DBMS, PostgreSQL, with modifications to process parallel queries and manage the parallel workload. Greenplum has also implemented a software interconnect to create the MPP system.

Greenplum is a new vendor that must still be described as a startup, but this low-priced, high-performance DW appliance could enable it to disrupt the current DW DBMS market. Initial reports from customers are strong. If, when used with the Sun X4500, the DW appliance can produce high-performance results with a mixed DW workload of ad hoc queries, standard reporting and continuous loading, it could compete effectively against DW products from DATAlegro, IBM, Netezza, Oracle and Teradata.

Recommendations

- Understand the potential risks of deploying an emerging solution like Sun's new DW appliance. Only organizations with a high level of internal expertise in DBMSs and DW systems should consider deploying this appliance. Weigh these risks against the initial reward of the cost savings.
- Watch for signs of maturity in the product, such as a larger reference base, which could confirm that it has demonstrated the ability to manage the mixed workload of a modern, enterprise-scale DW and has performed as promised.

Analytical Source: Donald Feinberg, Gartner

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Sun Re-enters the Blade Server Market Through Opteron Line" — The new Sun Fire X4500 Opteron rack and blade servers address high-performance computing and consolidation infrastructure requirements. **By Paul McGuckin**
- "Preparing for an Open-Source Software DBMS World" — The increasing number of open-source software entries in the DBMS world demonstrates how the open-source movement is gaining headway in this market. **By Donald Feinberg**

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