

## 'Big Blue' Goes Green With Energy Efficiency Initiative

Rakesh Kumar

IBM presented its energy efficiency initiative, which is aimed at helping users deal with data center energy use issues. This should help it overtake earlier initiatives from Sun and HP.

### Event

On 10 May 2007, IBM announced "Project Big Green." It plans to spend \$1 billion a year to increase energy efficiency in IT. Its initiative includes new products and services for both IBM and its clients that will help reduce data center energy consumption via:

- Data center services that cover the offerings from the Site and Facilities arms of IBM Global Services
- Cool Blue programs that cover energy-efficient technologies (from the Systems and Technology Group) and energy management solutions (from the Tivoli Group)
- Industrywide initiatives, such as the Green Grid
- IBM's internal data center and environmental responsibility programs
- Utilities and government initiatives, such as work with the Environmental Protection Agency
- Customer-focused programs

### Analysis

This is a companywide approach aimed at presenting the organization in the context of "green IT." It covers IBM's internal energy efficiency programs and strategies for working with external customers.

Over the last two years, many enterprises have faced the issue of excessive energy needs for powering and cooling data centers. At the same time, global environmental concerns have increased. This has led many organizations to question the "greenness" of their key technologies and the vendors that provide them.

In the past 18 months Sun Microsystems, HP and IBM have introduced technologies and services to address some of these issues. But so far this effort has been around point technologies rather than via an integrated approach. We believe that companies are looking for a more holistic approach when selecting servers and storage devices and when seeking help with developing environmentally friendly IT solutions.

With this announcement, IBM is getting serious about energy efficiency and green IT issues and is bringing together many different parts of its organization under a common theme. This is a significant statement of unification that should offer users a more comprehensive set of solutions, including products, services and financing. The announcement also shows that IBM sees the power and cooling issue at the data center level, whereas both HP and Sun see it at a product level. Furthermore, IBM's statement of relationships with organizations such as APC-MGE, Eaton, Emerson Network Power/Liebert, GE Consumer & Industrial and Schneider Electric will help users integrate server and facilities solutions. But there is little indication that IBM will actively provide solutions spanning key competitors' products.

IBM's plan to create a global "green team" of more than 850 energy efficiency architects is an astute investment in its data center design and management capabilities. If executed as planned, it will give the company an important sales thrust and the chance to set the green agenda in many accounts.

IBM has been late in articulating its energy efficiency and green IT programs, allowing Sun and HP to gain an advantage in end-user perception of greenness. But it seems to be serious about gaining an upper hand. By directing \$1 billion a year to increase energy efficiency in IT, the message in this announcement is a significant step toward its goal.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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Users should:

- Treat green claims with caution. Although IBM appears to be heading in a positive direction, we are concerned that the industry is still not policing itself in terms of claiming technologies and services are green when they are not. Major vendors continue to promote the environmental benefits of many products and services, ignoring, or occasionally even promoting, products that are environmentally inefficient. Clients establishing green IT policies should not take vendor statements at face value.
- Monitor how effectively IBM is able to use its own efficiency initiatives to reduce its power consumption as it doubles the computing capacity of its data centers within the next three years
- Evaluate the various products and services that IBM is now offering under its energy efficiency initiative. This will need to be done by different groups, such as procurement, infrastructure planning and facilities management.
- Qualify the procurement of new energy efficiency services and technologies through strong internal technical and financial due diligence.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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- "Data Center Power and Cooling Scenario: Options for the Road Ahead" — Users need to consider a number of options to manage data center power and cooling problems. **By Rakesh Kumar**
- "Why 'Going Green' Will Become Essential for Data Centers" — Gartner examines the key issues and offers some guidance on how data centers can meet the new demands. **By Rakesh Kumar**

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

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