

Microsoft's Whistler Gets a Name: Windows .NET Server

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Enterprises should consider the naming of Microsoft's Windows .NET Server — the follow-on to Windows 2000 Server that was formerly code-named "Whistler" — a branding change, as opposed to a major technology shift.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 19 June 2001, at its annual TechEd Conference, Microsoft formally announced that the name of the follow-on release to Windows 2000 Server will be Windows .NET Server.

Analysis

Traditionally Microsoft's business model has revolved around packaged software for general-purpose Intel-based PCs and servers. However, the "software as a service" concept has created an opportunity for software to be delivered as services from a myriad of server devices, to a myriad of client devices. .NET is Microsoft's response to this threat, as the software giant is attempting to turn adversity into opportunity, by using its relationships with developers and their PC installed bases as a starting point. Fundamentally, .NET requires developer tools (Visual Studio is now in beta 2), key Web-based services (Passport is already available), and a Common Language Runtime (CLR) on platforms.

The key .NET difference with Windows .NET Server will be the addition of a pre-integrated CLR. In other words, Windows .NET Server will already have the .NET runtime included, making it ".NET-ready." However, enterprises interested in .NET capabilities needn't wait for Windows .NET Server: Microsoft will make the CLR available as an add-on for Windows 2000, Windows XP and other operating systems.

The Windows .NET Server naming should be considered a branding change, not a fundamental technology change. Initially, when .NET was first announced, Microsoft produced a white paper that described a bifurcation of Windows into .NET and "classic" variants, which caused confusion among Microsoft customers and immediately slowed migrations. Then, Microsoft introduced the .NET Enterprise Servers, Windows XP (clients), and Windows 2002 (servers), apparently following three different branding directions. Now the confusion will be centered on:

- Whether the clients are .NET-ready or not (the only difference is the CLR, which will be downloadable or installed with applications that require it)
- Whether Windows .NET Server is a major architectural change from Windows 2000 (it isn't; it remains a minor upgrade).

Gartner's position on Windows .NET Server remains the same: Regardless of the name, enterprises should consider this a point release upgrade to Windows 2000, with minor but potentially useful changes/improvements in Active Directory and manageability in general. Enterprises in the process of rolling out Windows 2000 Server today do not need to wait for Windows .NET Server (which should become available in late 1Q02, 0.7 probability). However, enterprises planning to deploy Active Directory anytime in mid-2002 or later should strongly consider Windows .NET Server as their target. Gartner does not expect fundamental stability issues with Windows .NET Server. However, the CLR is completely new functionality and should be considered suspect until year-end 2002.

Analytical Source: Thomas Bittman, NT Strategies

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