NetScout and Cisco Expand Technlogy Partnership, Offer Virtual Probes in Routers

Abstract

On March 16, 2010, NetScout Systems announced the availability of nGenius Integrated Agent as part of an ongoing and expanding technology relationship with Cisco. NetScout is integrating this virtualized probe technology into Cisco's Integrated Services Routers (ISRs) to extend the NetScout Unified Service Delivery Management solution out to the branch office. The goal of this new offering is to provide a cost effective approach to monitoring branch office locations and give IT staff continuous visibility into the end-to-end performance of applications and services.

Event

NetScout has announced the nGenius Integrated Agent, a software-based solution for deploying their nGenius Probe technology into Cisco ISRs. This is NetScout's first virtualized packet-flow monitoring technology for deployment on third-party network equipment. The integration of the nGenius Probe technology onto the branch router eliminates the need for an additional monitoring appliance in the branch and therefore reduces deployment cost and complexity as well as ongoing maintenance cost. It also extends high-performance packet-flow monitoring and analysis capabilities from the data center out into branch.

The nGenius Integrated Agent has been certified through the Cisco Interoperability Verification Testing (IVT) program and is available and shipping now. The new product is delivered pre-configured with the Cisco AXP software and is a self-contained application which can be installed locally on-site or remotely. The nGenius Integrated Agent is supported on Cisco 2800 and 3800 series ISRs and Cisco 2900 and 3900 series ISR G2 platforms and is deployed in conjunction with a Network Module Enhanced (NME) or Services Ready Engine (SRE) services module, which must be purchased separately. The nGenius Integrated Agent acts as a local agent and data source, feeding application and network performance information into NetScout's nGenius Performance Manager as part of an enterprise-class performance monitoring solution.

Market Context

This announcement firmly underscores the ongoing development of the Cisco-NetScout technology relationship. At Interop in May 2009, NetScout announced the integration of its Sniffer Global Analyzer with the open application programming interface of the Cisco Mobility Services Engine (MSE), bringing detailed performance visibility and troubleshooting into wireless LAN environments. In October 2009, NetScout announced that they had joined the Cisco Developer Network Program as part of the Unified Communications technology category. NetScout's nGenius Performance Manager Version 4.6 and Sniffer Intelligence version 4.6 had successfully completed interoperability testing with Cisco Systems Unified Communications Manager 6.1. With this latest announcement, NetScout's virtualized probe technology is now part of the Cisco Developer Network for Cisco ISRs. This is a big nod to NetScout, and is the first time that Cisco has engaged a partner to deliver

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a packet-flow monitoring solution on its flagship edge routers. The Cisco-NetScout relationship now spans wireless, unified communications, and routing technologies.

Virtualization is the wave of the future. It is moving beyond servers to other components in the network. IT departments need visibility not just across the network, but into virtualized environments to better understand where and how network topologies might be impacting application performance. Virtualization does not make network performance and troubleshooting problems go away, it makes them twice as hard to unravel. By definition virtualization hinders visibility, and yet effective service delivery requires full disclosure and transparency from all network traffic.

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Some would argue that virtualization of network components is a threat to appliance-oriented network performance monitoring vendors such as NetScout. Another way of looking at it is to see virtualization as an opportunity. While hardware appliances can offer some performance benefits, the primary added value is often simply the expanded data storage for the purposes of historical data analysis and troubleshooting. It is the software that performs the primary collection of data for analysis, analytics and reporting. This announcement marks NetScout's continuing work in the area of virtualization. NetScout already announced the nGenius Virtual Agent software back in October and has recently been recognized with innovation awards for this product. It was the first virtualized implementation of the company's nGenius Probe technology. The nGenius Virtual Agent software extended performance visibility into the virtual server, and importantly was NetScout's first delivery of its nGenius Probe technology in a software-only, virtual appliance package.

Using network equipment as a point of service integration is something Cisco has been pursuing for some time. Their own Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) solution for WAN optimization has been available on the ISR for several years and now ships as an appliance-based implementation. Cisco's ISR supports solutions from other third-party vendors such as: Infoblox, Avocent, OSIsoft, and ProSyst. In addition, over the past 12-18 months, several networking vendors have created value-added solutions themselves or with partners that reduce the hardware footprint. Riverbed has developed the Riverbed Services Platform, which can run up to five additional services and applications on VMware in a protected partition on their Steelhead appliance. Companies that have signed up to deploy on RSP include OPNET, Checkpoint, Websense, and Infoblox. HP has also launched a virtual computing/hosting capability within their ProCurve network switches.

EMA Perspective

Of the three announcements with Cisco over the last 12 months, this is the most significant and wide reaching for NetScout. While the other two announcements are limited to Cisco wireless and VoIP solutions, this is tied into one of the core components of Cisco's "Borderless Networks" strategy – the Cisco ISR and ISR G2 platforms. Borderless Networks is Cisco's architectural approach for addressing the demands of cloud computing. The ISR has been one of Cisco's most successful and popular networking platforms since its introduction in 2004. The ability to address this user base provides new opportunities for NetScout's existing and prospective customers and is a great way to test the virtualization waters working in conjunction with a large network equipment vendor. Cisco equally benefits, being able to offer a cost effective way to enable end-to-end network visibility out to the remote branch. The NetScout solution compliments Cisco's current Network Analysis Module (NAM), which supplies localized troubleshooting. Cisco and NetScout have been technology partners for many years and at one time Cisco was an OEM of NetScout's probe technology. That is good for customers since it means less of a learning curve for sales and support channels.

The new reality is about limited IT spending. Companies are looking for ways to save money, and when they do spend it, the ROI needs to be readily apparent and measurable. Data center consolidation and cost cutting will continue to be major drivers for platform consolidation. Consequently, companies will be purchasing technology from fewer companies and will be more likely to standardize on a smaller number of vendors for as many converged technology needs as possible. Network management vendors have always needed to be nimble and flexible, reaching out to form new partnerships and alliances to improve their opportunities to serve all the needs of their existing customers as well as to reach new audiences. Cisco's ISR installed base measures in the millions of units. NetScout recognized the benefit of that partnership and the opportunities that it represents.

NetScout is answering the call for better and broader visibility with this strategic alignment

Networks are getting very complicated. The good news is the more complex the networking infrastructure gets, the more demand there will be for good visibility solutions, and NetScout is answering that call. Plus, NetScout does not appear to be tied exclusively to Cisco, and hence has the opportunity to implement this technology in other hardware platforms down the road. ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) analysts believe this is a strategic play for NetScout and would expect to see more like it in the coming months and years.

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