Windows Server 2008:  
The Shape of the World to Come

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My friend and colleague Nahum Goldmann of Array Development <http://www.arraydev.com> is a keen observer whose correspondence I value. Recently he sent me an interesting commentary about new developments in the world of Windows servers and I convinced him to write it up as an article for you. The remained of today’s column is entirely Nahum’s with minor edits:

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Last July, Microsoft announced that Windows Server 2008 (formerly known as Longhorn) would be launched on February 27, 2008 at a glitzy event in Los Angeles. As the pricing for its various packaging options has already been released (ranging from $999 to $3,999 for different configurations), Server 2008 will soon be a real product, whether it is ready or not.

In the frenzy of complex technical and security data for Server 2008 being discussed in the technical press (e.g., see http://www.networkworld.com/newsletters/edu/2007/1210ed1.html), by far the major news is decidedly non-technical. Unlike many previous versions of its predecessors, the move to this new Microsoft server is likely to trigger a radical shift in the business and social spheres far beyond the usual set of mundane issues related to IT system administration.

According to the data carefully leaked by the company itself, Server 2008 will likely exterminate 32-bit computing as we currently know it. As cited in _Information Week_ (January 21, 2007)<http://www.informationweek.com/news/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=205801265>, Microsoft claims that more than half of new server downloads are currently a 64-bit version. Knowing how the company usually markets its strategic products, it likely means that in two or three years, Microsoft will announce that the full powers of Windows Server 2008 are indeed in the 64-bit version, killing the 32-bit server by citing irreconcilable difficulties with its memory allocation, security, authentication and other details.

It is also not that difficult to forecast that for a variety of reasons Server 2008 64-bit version will "operates best" and provides all of its advanced features working _only_ with Vista 64-bit enabled workstations. Granted, the absolute majority of new Vista-compatible machines are unsuitable to support the full power of Vista 64-bit. But with the new security, authentication and operational enablers built into the server-workstation infrastructure, Microsoft might be able to force all corporate desktops and laptops to be 64-bit. It won't hurt that the company will make tons of money in the process, in essence selling the same stuff to everybody several times over.

On the surface, the main conclusion should be that anybody who is buying a 32-bit hardware or software today is wasting their money. Network maintenance support and online security will also be conducted differently compared to the conventional approaches; hence, many currently popular technical solutions will become unsustainable. However, the implications to the high-
tech industry (not just computing but voice and data communications as well) are likely to be profound. This shift in hardware architecture will cause major changes in business, marketing and financial survival for all leading high-tech corporate entities but especially to the ones that cater to small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

As it has done before, in announcing a new software package Microsoft might also be trying to get rid of a major enabling competitor. For Server 2008, the likely roadkill target is Citrix, which might be seen by the Redmond crowd as becoming far too big for its britches. Server 2008 includes Windows 2008 Terminal Services, which squarely targets Citrix for management of client connections, especially in small-scale network deployments favored by SMEs.

The bottom line: fasten your seat belts -- the new spiral of business competition is starting another major loop.

[MK adds: from a security standpoint – and in terms of availability in particular -- the industry experience with new Microsoft products strongly supports my long-held view that whenever possible, production shops should avoid installing new MS software until several months after it has been released. Unless you absolutely need new functionality, why subject yourself to being unwilling participants in a beta-test program? Wait for Service Pack (SP) 1; maybe even for SP2. ]

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