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Face-Off: VMware vs. Microsoft in the hypervisor wars

Colin Steele

Profile: Colin Steele

FACE-OFF

The great virtualization debate: VMware vs. Microsoft

Ken Cline and Dave Sobel take sides in the hypervisor wars.

Ken Cline

Ken Cline

I hear the sabers rattling already! The selection of a hypervisor borders on religion — and with good reason. The hypervisor you choose to deploy in your data center is the foundation of your computing infrastructure. If your hypervisor fails, your datacenter stops.

There are three hypervisor vendors offering mainstream products: Citrix (XenServer), Microsoft (Hyper-V) and VMware (VMware Infrastructure). Each has devoted followers who believe their product of choice is “the best”. Well, I’m here to set the record straight once and for all: VMware has the most mature, most robust solution offering available, bar none.

Dave Sobel

Dave Sobel

With Windows Server 2008, Microsoft created a new virtualization hypervisor called Hyper-V and moved the virtualization layer beneath even the host operating system.

Now functioning as an integrated role as part of Server 2008, Hyper-V creates a bubble under all the operating systems, including the host operating system. Thus, Hyper-V now manages the entire stack.

Hyper-V adds the ability to do migration from one physical host to another, as well as support for 64-bit operating systems over previous Microsoft offerings. Microsoft also

About This Blog

A server virtualization blog covering virtual machine (VM) management and administration, VMware, Xen, Microsoft, server consolidation and hardware, backup and disaster recovery, VDI (virtual desktop infrastructure) and more.

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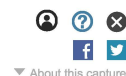
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mind that both Microsoft and Citrix have just completed a product refresh. VMware is on the cusp of releasing some amazing new technologies that will widen the gap between first and second place. Don't believe me? Ask Cisco. Who did Cisco decide to team with for its Unified Computing System? I'll give you a hint: It wasn't Microsoft, and it wasn't Citrix.

Yes, you can install Hyper-V or XenServer onto the Cisco UCS, but the out-of-the-box solution is based on VMware vSphere (the next release of VMware Infrastructure). I don't think Cisco would have bet the company on anything less than the best-of-breed solution, do you? Your hypervisor is your datacenter and your path to the future. Who do you trust to take you into the next generation of virtualization? Let's look at each company individually and see where they are — and where their future focus is:

Citrix grew up as an application delivery company. Its specialty has been, currently is and will continue to be the enhancement of application delivery on top of Microsoft technologies. Yes, it is dabbling in virtualization with XenServer, but that's not its bread and butter. Citrix exec Phil Montgomery even said last year that "Citrix is not a virtualization company. We're not trying to be another VMware."

Microsoft wants to be everything to everybody: your operating system provider, your application provider, your cloud provider and now your hypervisor provider, too. Talk about putting all your eggs in one basket! Now, imagine a piece of malware (or heaven forbid a bug) attacks a core function of Windows Server 2008. Not only do you lose the operating system that supports your applications, you lose the hypervisor that supports your operating systems! Additionally, Hyper-V is just now getting close to where ESX was in 2003. Will Microsoft develop

product called Hyper-V Server.

Additionally, Hyper-V is supported in Server Core, allowing a stripped-down Windows Server 2008 environment for virtualization. Microsoft clearly gives you the flexibility to deploy how you want.

Hyper-V is available as a role within Server 2008. In the data center, it's only several clicks away from being on any server. With support for clustering, highly available virtualization platforms are easy to create, and the R2 release will offer live migration, making the Microsoft offering as strong as any hypervisor on the market.

Microsoft has made licensing favorable for its own Hyper-V platform and now offers dozens of its products supported in its hypervisor. By selecting Microsoft, you know Microsoft-based applications are being tested on the platform.

Microsoft offers a familiar interface for management, leveraging the Microsoft Management Console as the mechanism to manage the hypervisor. This is a key advantage, because it makes the process of managing a Hyper-V-based system is familiar and known to those with experience managing any Microsoft system.

By integrating into a known management interface, Hyper-V users can take advantage of familiar interfaces and processes, along with comparable features to any hypervisor on the market.

Microsoft also continues its efforts around offering superior training, technical resources and sales and marketing support. The Microsoft Partner Program remains the strongest in the market, and Microsoft delivers all the materials necessary.

Hyper-V offers everything needed to virtualize any workload. It's simple to

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VMware has been focused on virtualization since the company was founded in 1998. Its specialty is core infrastructure services. They're not an afterthought or a distraction. The company has a track record of innovation in virtualization technologies that is unmatched. And its future, take a look — it's amazing!

If I were a betting man, I know where my money would be.

Ken Cline is a virtualization architect and blogger for the SearchServerVirtualization Blog and Ken's Virtual Reality.

in MMC snap-ins and the System Center suite of management tools.

System Center Virtual Machine Manager, dedicated to the management of both Hyper-V and VMWare workloads, is a single console for management.

And System Center rounds out the rest of the offering with products like Data Protection Manager for backups, Configuration Manager for deployment and Operations Manager for ongoing support.

Dave Sobel is CEO of Evolve Technologies and author of "Virtualization: Defined. A Primer for the SMB Consultant."

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