REPORT REPRINT

ATS fleshes out cloud-based infrastructure performance management play

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ATS Group – a 14-year-old IT consulting firm and IBM business partner – is putting more emphasis behind its software business. The company, formed by former IBM systems architects, has developed its Galileo Performance Explorer – described by the company as an infrastructure performance management (IPM) suite – since 2007, chiefly for use by its own consultants and by clients. However, in the past seven years, ATS Group has invested to enhance the platform as a stand-alone commercial offering; it positions Galileo as the industry's first SaaS/cloud-based IPM offering.

THE 451 TAKE

The storage management market may not occupy the position in the industry that it did a decade ago and adoption levels never really met initial lofty expectations, but that doesn't mean there isn't a market for this technology. Indeed, as storage becomes more complex and fragmented and as virtualization and as other 'software defined' approaches to infrastructure break down the relationships between physical resources, you could argue that there has never been a greater need for end-to-end infrastructure management capabilities. The company needs to execute on its plan to support a wider range of resources, but its emphasis on fast payback and simplicity could trigger broader adoption

CONTEXT

ATS is a well-established IBM-centric IT business and consulting company. It was founded in 2001 by two former IBM engineers – Tim Conley and Chris Churchey – respectively billed as storage and server experts. Headquartered in Malvern, Pennsylvania, ATS employs around 60 consultants and works across a range of IBM system and storage projects for some 400 clients worldwide.

The company began developing Galileo in 2007 as a way to simplify the client support process. Clients found it so simple to use that ATS made it available to them as a cloud service for providing ad hoc access to their system and storage performance metrics, the company said.

Although ATS has been steadily investing in Galileo for the best part of a decade, it recently ramped up investment in the platform to serve a broader range of customer requirements. It's also building out a dedicated go-to-market program for the product. The company has around 15 full-time staff working on Galileo, with 11 developers and four sales staff and more hires planned. It says it has so far invested roughly $3.6m in developing the platform; there are no outside investors. The company says its long-term goal is to make Galileo attractive to would-be buyers.

There are currently around 120 Galileo customers; these range from small shops to Fortune 50 organizations. Around 40% of these customers are already engaged with ATS, with the remaining majority coming from word-of-mouth, trade events and so on. Sales have been mostly direct thus far, but the company is building out a partner program, initially focused on the IBM business partner ecosystem. ATS's publicly disclosed reference customers are Welch's, the processing and marketing subsidiary of the US National Grape Cooperative; cosmetic giant L'Oreal; toothpaste manufacturer Colgate; and IT distributor Arrow.

PRODUCTS

According to ATS, Galileo Performance Explorer offers deep visibility into both systems and storage resources. It provides IT administrators with a simple way of identifying potential future performance and capacity bottlenecks. Customers can optimize their resource usage across a blend of environments, the company says.

It features a range of customizable data views and dashboards. A significant new capability was added earlier this year in the form of an alerting engine. This allows storage and server admins to set a range of thresholds across physical metrics such as CPU, memory/cache and disk utilization. It also reads logical metrics such as file system, volume and cluster performance, and utilization. Its largest customer is monitoring over 2000 servers, the company says, and deployed its service in less than one day.

Although Galileo initially focused on server optimization – there are server agents for IBM (AIX and GPFS, with

support for iSeries planned for Q4); Solaris; Windows; VMware (added in April this year); Linux (Red Hat and SUSE) – it has now expanded into the storage domain. Support here is currently concentrated on IBM storage platforms – the DS family, XIV, V7000, SoNAS and SVC (support for IBM FlashSystem is also pending) – although it also recently added support for NetApp FAS systems.

Support is planned later this year for systems from EMC, Hitachi Data Systems and HP 3PAR, as well as SAN switches from Cisco and Brocade. There are also agents planned for specific applications, including Oracle, DB2 and SQL Server. ATS works with multiple third-party agent developers to develop system and application support. The Galileo service uses subscription-based pricing, where host server/OS agents are priced on a per-host/per-year basis, while storage is pricing on an annual capacity basis.

The company says SAN switch support will allow it to expand the service to offer cause-and-effect correlation services. ATS believes the support will substantially add to the appeal of the service since it will enable end-to-end monitoring of the entire infrastructure.

The company also recently released a suite-level health check alert, providing a unified graphical view of server resources and recommendations for capacity, configuration and availability based on anticipated requirements. In September, it plans to release a suite-level enterprise dashboard that will offer a single-pane-of-glass spanning health checks and alerts. It will position this as the industry's first cloud-based IT enterprise dashboard.

Galileo works by installing data collection agents in the host OS at customer locations. system data is securely transmitted – at a rate of up to once per minute – to Galileo's hosted facility in Philadelphia. The company's internal SLA mandates any data chart can be loaded in under two seconds. The company stresses that no customer or user data is ever exchanged or transmitted to its facility, but it also offers an on-premises offering for customers with the most stringent security requirements. The option is used by a handful of customers. At some point Galileo anticipates that it will also run its service in a large public cloud like AWS.

COMPETITION

Although most storage and system vendors offer some form of performance and resource management capability, usage of such products has been fairly low, while the anticipated development of a robust market for cross-platform management products has largely failed to materialize, especially in the storage market. ATS attributes this to the complexity of legacy management products: They are both complex to install and manage and pricing is complex. Prominent offerings here include IBM (Tivoli Productivity Center), NetApp (OnCommand) and EMC (ViPR SRM).

Beyond the large players, a number of smaller specialists invest in the broader infrastructure management space. Perhaps the most well-known is Virtual Instruments, but it has a very different approach (it requires the SAN to be tapped to gain insight). ATS says Galileo can deliver 80% of VI's functionality at a fraction of the cost and effort. Other players that are increasing their focus on this space broadly include SolarWinds and French storage management specialist SAN Sentinel

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

Galileo's emphasis on time to value and simplicity should make it a relatively straightforward sale in a product area that historically has been much more complex.

WEAKNESSES

ATS Group is not well known outside of the IBM partner ecosystem. There are still limitations in terms of third-party storage support.

OPPORTUNITIES

The appeal of Galileo proposition should increase as the company adds more analysis and end-to-end correlation capabilities.

THREATS

Larger vendors can often bundle in their own similar storage management capabilities at little or no extra cost to the customer.