

# Chris Stone

## Stitching Together a Winning Company



**N**ovell Connection interviewed Chris Stone just two weeks after he returned to Novell as vice chairman in the office of the CEO. This was not the first time we had interviewed Chris, however. When we talked to Chris four years ago, he was senior vice president for Strategy Development at Novell, and he was leading an initiative to move Novell toward open protocols and standards. (See “Chris Stone: Novell’s Senior Vice President Explains the OSA Initiative,” *Novell Connection*, May 1998, pp. 22–23. You can download this article from [www.ncmag.com/past](http://www.ncmag.com/past).) In that sense, not much has changed. Chris is adamant: Novell will completely embrace open standards and discard proprietary interfaces.

In fact, Chris is adamant about a number of things. Although he frankly acknowledges Novell’s mistakes, he is quick to point out that the company has continued to build technological “gems”—pieces which he thinks can be “stitched” together to create unbeatable solutions. In this interview, Chris clearly outlines Novell’s future as a customer-driven company that focuses on solutions, and he lists the goals that he intends to accomplish in his first 100 days.

**Q Why did you return to Novell, and why now?**

**A** Here’s a good answer: I never left; I was on sabbatical. You can ask some of the employees: I stayed in touch over the 2 ½ years. I didn’t disappear.

To be perfectly frank, I left out of some frustration. We were just talking about the interview I did with *Novell Connection* four years ago. You said it, “You’re saying a lot of the same things now that you said then.” I was frustrated because in order for Novell to grow and to expand its particular market share and its revenue opportunities, it had to develop a customer focus and a solution focus—and that’s everything I was trying to do back then.

What’s interesting is as I look around in Engineering, I find a lot of gems. These guys have done a lot of work the past couple of years. It’s just that nobody knows about it. So I think primarily I came back because I really believe in the company. I’ve always had a soft spot for Novell.

The other reason I came back is that the new management—particularly Jack Messman [Novell president and CEO]—gave me an opportunity to make the changes this time, and that’s significant to me. As you can see, I’m already doing it.

And the other issue is I built a directory application. The company I went off and built was still using Novell products. Let’s just say I went away for 2 ½ years and got smarter.

**Q You have made a lot of changes since your return. Why did you make these changes? Are you ushering in another “new” Novell?**

**A** Let’s not call it another new Novell. I am absolutely not after any new Novell; I’m just after Novell. What I want, and what the management team wants, is to build a company that has new revenue opportunities and builds upon its current technology strengths and turns them into a solution focus. The industry’s moving that way.

The reason we have made significant personnel changes is because we felt they were roadblocks. I made it very clear when I spoke to the employees a week ago, that if they’re not going to be on the program and they’re not going to sign up for the strategy we’re going to put forth, then they should go someplace else because we really want an attitudinal adjustment in the entire company: We are going to win and stop apologizing for not being able to get there now.

Part of my role frankly is to cheerlead. It’s to get people excited again and to get people thinking more creatively and bubbly that creativity sideways, not just up and down. That’s what I’m after. I’m going to be relentless at it. I’m not going to sleep.

We’re going to get very focused as well. Go to Novell’s web site and look through Novell’s product list. I did this last night; I counted the products again—162. No. We’re going to focus on four or five key solution areas that we know we can use our expertise to dominate. Whether it’s identity management, provisioning, or the new web services area, we’re going to pick those solution areas, and we’re going to focus the company around them.

Those are the kinds of changes and adjustments that are going to take place. Plus there will be a lot more organizational changes. We’re going to centralize some things again; we’re going to put Marketing in one place. As a matter of fact, we just announced a new Chief Marketing Officer, Novell’s first Chief Marketing Officer, Debra Bergevine. Things are moving fast.

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**Q** You've outlined some of your long-term goals. What are your goals for the first 100 days?

**A** In 100 days, I want to have the organization in place to attack and focus around key solution areas so that we can generate revenue. Those areas will primarily be identity and provisioning, collaboration and teamwork, the whole notion of software distribution—you would call this ZENworks—and web services. Today we call web services EAI—enterprise application integration—but the future is to stitch applications over the Internet based on standards. That then means driving the company toward industry standard interfaces, not proprietary interfaces. Again, if you go back and read the interview [in *Novell Connection*] four years ago, that's what I said. I wasn't kidding then; I'm not kidding now. As a matter of fact, if you were to call engineers in the company, they would tell you, "Oh, he's got the hornet's nest stirred up this time, and we're going to move in that direction."

The directory becomes a UDDI server and a policy engine. NetWare continues to become more of an application platform, an integration platform over time. As a matter of fact, some of the announcements we made at Novell BrainShare prove we are moving toward a Java development environment and web standard development environment. For example, we announced the upcoming beta of Novell eDirectory 8.7, which will drive the adoption of the UDDI standard and provide wireless and web-based administration. NLMs will disappear forever.

You may say that we're a day late and a dollar short. Maybe we're a day late, but I don't think there's a dollar short here. There's a huge opportunity, and no one really owns this notion of solutions.

The other thing I want to accomplish in the next 100 days is the fulfilled merger between the two companies so that there's operating efficiency between the Cambridge component and the Novell side. It's one company; it happens to be two different brands, but we need to utilize the consulting activity in cooperation with the solutions.

Consulting doesn't necessarily help with a point product; it does help with

a suite or a solution set. Basically, we have to have our sales reps asking, "How can we help you?" rather than "What would you like to buy?" If you put it in that kind of terminology, that's what we're after.

Then we must address customer facing. All of our systems and the way we do business—our customer and technical support, and our education—



all of that will be much more customer centric, much more customer focused. Novell has never had a customer council. We're going to form that council. We're going to listen more. We're going to get people on airplanes more.

We will be very customer and sales driven, not necessarily technically driven. We'll be technically adept, but we'll be driven by customers and sales. That's very different for this company.

**Q** Are you going to change the Novell vision of one Net?

**A** No. It is one Net. That message is very good, quite frankly, and it's starting to get traction. These things take years. Novell has always had this habit of saying, "Let's try this approach," and then 18 months later, saying, "Well, that didn't work; let's go try another approach." It takes years for brands and messages to get ingrained in people. You have to be repetitive.

No, we're not going to change the one Net model, but we are going to change the focus underneath it to the solution areas I was talking about.

**Q** Will these changes accelerate Novell's ability to arrive at one Net?

**A** Absolutely. You're not going to arrive at one Net unless you have standard ways

to do it, right? You must have standard interfaces between your own products. You know as well as I do that if you bought three different point products from Novell right now and tried to install them, they wouldn't look like they came from the same company. They have different interfaces.

That has to be fixed. You don't do that overnight, and you don't do that by putting consultants on it. You do that by changing the way products actually communicate from a technical perspective with each other. The interfaces between them can't be proprietary; they have to be based around XML.

We've made all kinds of proclamations to Engineering, and now we're driving it into the ranks that this is what we're going to do. All of the product plans are changing as we speak to reflect this. These changes will deliver on the one Net vision.

We will also move into the web services area, which you've heard IBM, BEA, Sun, and all the big boys talk about. All they are doing is positioning. We've actually built a lot of these pieces. Once we have a standard set of Internet-like interfaces, just imagine, with all of the technology we have, how we can stitch together a solution for customers in very quick fashion. It really changes the game.

I guess that's a long way to answer yes, there's a huge opportunity here for us. All we have to do is execute, and I know that's your next question.

**Q** How are you going to execute?

**A** As we put this part together, this has to be reflected in our consulting solution team. They have to follow exactly the same model. It can't be different. The sales force—the four regions we have now—will be driven toward these solution areas and will sell based on that model. It's a software company building solutions based on a customer need or problem, so the execution is going to be, quite frankly, the hard part.

It really just requires leadership to get everybody moving in that direction, and I think we've got that leadership. Jack [Messman] is putting together his team to make that happen. You will see us do some acquisitions—no, I'm not going to tell you what they are. But you will see us get fairly

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serious about these things, whether it's web services, provisioning, or one of those areas where we're weak and we want to own it, we will. It's a very different attitude, and again it goes back to why I came back: I get to help with that attitude.

**Q How does Novell define web services, and what will Novell's role be in delivering these web services?**

**A** Web services, quickly defined, is the ability to build an application in the Internet, not applications on NT, not NLMs on NetWare, not Java on a UNIX machine. That's what we do today. The programming languages are, in essence, built for the machine, and applications are built for the department. What if you could use a language or a development environment that was totally distributed and the parts were in the Internet in multiple sites and you could connect those parts based around standard interfaces? This is what WSDL, XML, and UDDI are all about. They provide you with the interfaces to stitch those applications together. In order to do that, though, you have to have a platform from which to launch it.

As Jack [Messman] has explained, web services can be categorized as basic and extended. Basic meaning the framework, or standards part, and extended, or outside the enterprise, being the ability to build applications outside your firewall and attach them to applications inside your firewall.

That's what web services is all about. BEA will tell you it's an app server called WebLogic; IBM will tell you it's WebSphere; Sun will tell you it's Sun ONE; Microsoft will tell you it's .Net. But as I said before, they don't have the pieces in place—pieces meaning all of the standard interfaces, the directory, UDDI, the platform like NetWare, and a set of solutions for provisioning, for authoring, for software distribution, for teamwork and collaboration.

We've got the pieces. Our goal now is to put that all together in one cohesive environment and drive the web services model forward. That's what we're going to do.

There are some missing pieces and you'll see us make some bolder moves in that area.

**Q What's wrong with Novell; why isn't it winning?**

**A** I think the problem has been leadership. As I said, there are just so many gems, whether it's people, technologies, consulting, or support—it just hasn't been stitched together. Seriously, it just looks like stuff comes from all these different companies.

The Marketing department has done a great job with the one Net mission and the branding campaign they've been on. But unless you have a company backing it up, that's not



going to get you there. I think that there really hasn't been a leadership team leading and cheering and driving—almost to the point that it's compulsive—that this is what we're going to do, and let's go.

I think we've got that leadership now. That's my answer. I think people wanted to win and were waiting for something to happen. Maybe it's a day late and a dollar short again, but I don't think so.

**Q There are different definitions of suites and solutions. How do you define these words?**

**A** A *suite* could be taking three products and squashing them together. A *solution* is based around solving a particular problem for a customer. Let's say you're a large customer and you have single sign-on issues—too many passwords. A product that solves that would be Novell SecureLogin. A solution is much more because the problem isn't just about multiple passwords; it's how do you provision users into your Human Resources system. It's how do you then

connect applications into your platform to take advantage of these new provisioned users who may be changing their passwords all the time. You see, it's sort of a domino effect.

One solution to the problem set may be Novell iChain, Novell SecureLogin, provisioning, and identity management. With a solution like this, you don't have the customer coming back every six months, saying, "Could you fix this, could you add this feature?" You're solving more of a horizontal problem in the company, not a point problem. That's a solution to me.

In addition to that, a solution allows you to expand the opportunity to make revenue, and that's where the consulting arm comes in. If you build the solution in such a way that it makes customers think horizontally, they're always going to come up with, "Well, now what about my manufacturing group? I want them to use this [solution] as well." Then, you use consulting to integrate those pieces together. That's what we are going to do.

**Q Novell's lost a lot of developers.**

**A** It certainly has. Novell treated developers like poor cousins. No apology on that one; we just sucked at it.

**Q So there's a problem. How are you going to fix that problem?**

**A** A lot of that is focus. Our whole developer services group is in the wrong place organizationally. We're going to fix that. We're going to create a new model for them, and they're going to work for Carl Ledbetter, senior vice president of Engineering, Research and Development, so they will be on an equal organizational par as the products we are building.

That new organization will force an evangelism across not only our company but also to the developer in the outside world. It gives the developer services group much more elevation and attention.

We're also going to stop trying to get money out of developers and start treating them like we need them more than they need us. And furthermore, we're going to move to platforms that developers want to write applications to—whether those are authoring environments that are J2EE based, XML,

and other Internet standards such as WSDL and UDDI. Not NLMs, not NDAP, and not proprietary Novell interfaces.

Furthermore, we will then provide developers with tools. It's not just about the interfaces. You've got to give them a platform and some tools.

NetWare's future will be very focused around the developer. You'll hear me say that, and you'll hear Paul Feldman, the vice president of the Networking Services and Solutions group, say that.

**Q** **If the future of NetWare is focused around the developer, clearly NetWare continues as a product that our readers will be able to purchase.**

**A** You're absolutely correct. No, we're not going to sell NetWare to another software company. No, we're not going to put it in maintenance mode. None of those things is going to happen. It's the best network operating system on the planet. Now we're going to turn it into one of the best application development platforms for web services. The directory is a key component of that, and those four solution sets I talked about take advantage of both of those platforms—NetWare and the directory. Our services will also run on Linux, Solaris, AIX, and others.

**Q** **Do you think these efforts to turn NetWare into an application development platform and to attract developers are too little too late?**

**A** It's only too late if you don't provide developers with another incentive, another opportunity to do something. That's why we have to provide solutions as well—in other words, an authoring environment for web services, an identity and provisioning tool, or a security access tool. Developers don't want to write all those pieces. They want to be able to take parts and pieces and create the whole from the sum of the parts. That's in essence what we have to do.

But those parts, those applications have to be based around standard interfaces as well. Microsoft calls it .Net, but that's not yet. That's just a big strategy. Quite frankly, we're no worse off when it comes to the Internet as a development environment, so we have just as much an opportunity. We're

going to go get it; we're going to grab it.

**Q** **How quickly do you think you can put the pieces in place?**

**A** Well, this isn't going to happen in 100 days. We will certainly have the strategy in place [in 100 days], and we will certainly put in motion the organization. I talked about this earlier, and you'll see some other bold moves to get us moving. I think the fruits of the labor happen in 8 to 12 months. By the end of this year, you should see a fairly different company.

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**Q** **How will you try to change the perception of Novell as a technology company that cannot effectively market its products?**

**A** By doing what I just said. The company sells technology for technology's sake, and that's all centered around the notion of selling point products. We will get away from the point products and do a solution sell, into a more consulting solution sell. As I said earlier, that's going to take a lot. It's going to take sales force directional changes and attitudinal adjustments; it's going to take some more partnering and acquisitions; it's going to take an enormous amount of hard work and a lot of cheerleading in order to get people in that direction. But I'm very confident we'll get there.

The tools are all lying around. It's just putting them in a box.

**Q** **Our readers have watched a steady stream of executives come and go from Novell.**

**A** Me included.

**Q** **You're saying all the right things, but why should our readers believe you can and will deliver on your promises?**

**A** Words are cheap. You can listen to me say this all day. When I was here last time—only employees can back up this—I tried as hard as I could to make an enormous amount of changes. This time I have more of a country. I have more ability to do it this time. I'm going to make some wrong decisions; we—Jack and I and the rest of the management team—are going to make some wrong decisions, but we are going to make them this time. It's all going to be in our actions and it's all going to be in our execution. That's the only thing the outside world and the employees should judge us on. Don't judge us on the words; just judge us on what we do.

In the past two weeks, you've seen an enormous amount of that happen, and it's not going to stop. It's going to be tumultuous for a while inside the company until we get it where we want it to be. Watch the space.

From a marketing perspective, that's always been the bane. You [press] guys have always beat up the company over marketing. I did too. My goal in marketing is very simple: Be edgy, be competitive, and move up a level to a CxO audience. I think your audience will probably want that because they are tired of justifying who Novell is to their bosses.

We're not going to do Comdex and big shows any more. We're going to get real focused around CxO-level events. You're going to see Novell showing up in places you haven't normally seen us and say, “Wow, what are they doing here?” If you ask that question, that means we are doing our job. We're going to be very combative. Don't just believe me; watch what happens.

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