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Observations from the Floor of Novell BrainShare 2007



The Bottom Line:	The SUSE Linux desktop demos were really slick but outside the spotlight, ZENworks shines.
Key Concepts:	Virtualization, management, orchestration, automation, data center
Who Should Read:	Enterprise IT Managers, Data center managers, Network and systems administrators

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The Novell-Microsoft partnership and the slick demos of the SUSE Linux desktop rightfully captured much of the attention at Novell BrainShare 2007. But Novell also has a gem in its newly re-architected, ZENworks systems and resource management suite. Fresh off a 3-year development effort, ZENworks has a new web services-based architecture and all web-based user interfaces. Vista upgrades and integration into a larger management framework were the key drivers for the software refresh. ZENworks is now much more than desktop management and asset management; it is integrated into a larger management framework and is aligned with Novell's vision of Linux from the desktop to the data center.

ZENworks has always been known for its desktop management capabilities, but the management tools for the data center are impressive. Two features that stood out were ZENworks Virtual Machine Management (VMM) and ZENworks Orchestrator. VMM can provision and monitor SUSE Linux, VMWare, Xen and Microsoft Virtual Server virtual machines (VMs). Orchestrator is aptly named—it orchestrates the allocation of resources from the virtual pool according to policies.

In general, management is evolving to be more than simply the monitoring of systems and the generation of alerts. Systems management is becoming orchestration, the dynamic provisioning of virtual resources and workloads. Dynamic, automated provisioning of resources is met with a great deal of skepticism, and we're still in the early stages of the market. Few enterprises will buy the product today for full automation. But customers will want to try ZENworks for its immediate ability to manage multiple VM platforms and multiple Windows, Unix and Linux server platforms from a single console. The cool thing is that the customer is also (sometimes unwittingly) building a foundation for full datacenter automation.

On the desktop management side, Novell has a real opportunity to gain share in the desktop and asset management market. On March 15, Novell announced ZENworks Configuration Management, which includes native support for both Microsoft Active Directory and Novell eDirectory for real-time, identity-based systems management. Vista migrations and Symantec's recent acquisition of Altiris present a tremendous opportunity for Novell to increase its competitive position. Market rival Altiris is also in need of a software refresh. Symantec's acquisition of Altiris fills a need for Symantec, but it will take some for Symantec to integrate the products and update the architecture. The timing could not be better for Novell to market ZENworks and grab some market share.

The bottom line is that ZENworks has the breadth of product and multivendor support to be a standalone company. Too often, platform vendors will acquire a management tool and limit its value outside of their own platform. Novell made the right decision to support multiple vendors. Much of virtualization is becoming commoditized, and the growth in management will be in orchestration. Novell's strength in identity and security management will also be a differentiator—it is in a unique position to integrate identity and access controls into infrastructure orchestration. It's certainly not as attractive as the SUSE Linux desktop, but ZENworks—particularly its data center management capabilities—warrants its share of the spotlight.