News Briefs

TECHNOLOGY

Toshiba Readies 512-Gbyte Solid-State Drives

Toshiba is planning to showcase its 512-Gbyte solid-state drives (SSDs) at the 2009 Consumer Electronics Show. The drives will be the highest capacity available for consumers, and Toshiba plans to begin production in the second quarter of 2009. Toshiba's rival, Samsung, is in the process of mass producing 256-Gbyte SSDs for a launch in the first half of 2009. With no moving parts and low power consumption, SSDs are well suited for laptops. Toshiba's drives will come in a 2.5-inch form factor, fitting into laptops, desktops, and home entertainment systems. The company says the drives will feature a read speed of 240 Mbytes per second and a sequential write speed of 200 Mbytes per second. ❖

Sprint and Clearwire Seal the Deal on US Nationwide WiMAX Network

They're on again. Sprint and Clearwire's on-again-off-again relationship became legit in December. After some back and forth, Sprint and Clearwire have officially combined their efforts to build a nationwide WiMAX network. In December, the two companies completed the transaction and formed a new company that will retain the name Clearwire; the WiMAX service, however, will be marketed under the name Clear.

In July 2007, the two companies signed a letter of intent to build a nationwide WiMAX network, but the deal fell through. Sprint moved on by building its own test network in the Baltimore, Maryland, area under the name Xohm. Baltimore users won't experience any interruption in their service, Clearwire said, other than a rebranding of the Xohm name to Clear in keeping with the company's branding efforts.

The new union received a US$3.2 billion dollar investment from Comcast, Intel, Time Warner Cable, Google, and Bright House Networks. Sprint remains the largest shareholder in Clearwire and contributed its entire 2.5-GHz spectrum to it, bringing the network's spectrum holdings to more than 100 MHz. The company is touting average download speeds of 2 to 4 Mbps. Currently, the service is available in select cities in New York, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Ohio, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Texas, Hawaii, Alaska, Nevada, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California.

In anticipation of the network's rollout to other areas, Sprint also released a dual-mode WiMAX/CDMA router that lets users connect to its 3G network, and where available, WiMAX networks. The router is US$149.99 with a $50 mail-in rebate and requires a two-year subscription. ❖

New Licensing Changes Open Up OpenSUSE Even More

Novell changed the licensing requirements for OpenSUSE 11.1, making it easier to redistribute and keep in line with the open source community. The company removed proprietary software from organizations such as Sun and Adobe to avoid some of the distribution hassles previous versions had; users will have to download the proprietary software separately. To spur contributions from the community, Novell developed this version using the freely available development platform, OpenSUSE Build Service. Some of the new features this build includes are upgrades to the GNOME and KDE desktop environments, Novell's edition of OpenOffice.org 3.0, music synching with Android phones, video camera support, and improvements to system administration and installation. OpenSuse version 11.1 is available for free at http://software.opensuse.org/. ❖

Hey You, Get Off of My Cloud: Cloudbursting

With its record-setting sales this holiday season, it's a good thing Amazon has Jeff Barr around. Barr, the company's Web Services evangelist, gets the credit for the term, "cloudbursting." Bypassing the need for more hardware, software, and people, cloudbursting uses cloud computing to process over-capacity requests that retailers often have to handle during peak time, such as this past holiday season. Retailers can use the cloud like an external hard drive to store and process data while maintaining control of their enterprises, but without heavy expenditures in personnel and hardware.

Drawbacks do exist, however. Some applications will make data replication and duplication difficult. And heavily integrated applications aren't really viable options for cloudbursting; instead, the best applications to use require little integration with other applications. ❖

Linux Breathes AIR

In December, Adobe released a Linux version of its Adobe Integrated Runtime (AIR) Web application technology. AIR enables Web applications that can run on the desktop independent of a browser. The company said this version of AIR for Linux will work for users of OpenSUSE 10.3, Fedora Core, and Ubuntu 7.10. Adobe has yet to test the application on Red Hat Enterprise Linux Desktop. Web applications that use AIR can access local data and receive Internet updates, letting users work offline and still receive activity updates. Developers can create AIR applications using JavaScript, HTML, ActionScript, and Adobe Flex. ❖

HP Improves Its Virtualization Software

Hewlett-Packard has developed an enhanced version of Microsoft's Remote Desktop Protocol that will deliver rich content, such as streaming video, faster. Users will also be able to use several USB peripherals under the enhanced software. The company will start preinstalling the software in January on its thin clients running Windows XP Embedded; Linux thin clients will get the improved software later in the first quarter. For enterprises that require more power and performance, HP offers its Remote Graphics Software (RGS) protocol. The company slashed the price for RGS to US$35 per seat, down from a price of more than $100. Customers can also now use RGS on non-HP servers, which wasn't allowed previously. ❖

BUSINESS

Windows XP: Rumors of My Demise Have Been Greatly Exaggerated

PC builders can rejoice at the latest stay of execution for Windows XP: Microsoft recently announced that it has relaxed some of its licensing rules that directly affect them. The added flexibility lets authorized distributors place license orders for Windows XP by 31 January 2009 and take delivery against those orders by 30 May 2009. Prior to the change, distributors would have had to place their orders by the January deadline, as well as pay and take delivery of them. System builders will be able to purchase licenses from distributors for as long as supplies last.

Microsoft's latest change is the most recent regarding XP. In October, the company added six months of availability to its original 31 January 2009 deadline for original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). Larger companies, including Dell and Hewlett-Packard, can continue to purchase licenses for systems downgraded to XP from Windows Vista Business or Vista Ultimate machines until 31 July 2009. Microsoft has also extended the deadline for makers of low-cost laptops and desktops to sell Windows XP Home to 30 June 2010. ❖

Venture Capital Firm Injects Palm with US$100 Million Infusion

In December, Elevation Partners, a venture capital firm that counts U2 frontman Bono among its partners, announced it had invested US$100 million in Palm, maker of the Centro and Treo smart phones. With the iPhone's rising market share and competition from the Android-based G1 smart phone, Palm has been feeling the heat from both sides. The company plans to unveil its new line of consumer products at the 2009 Consumer Electronics Show. Among its products is a Linux-based smart phone that runs its upcoming Nova OS. For its enterprise products, Palm will still use Microsoft's Windows Mobile platform.

Elevation is a private equity firm and, in addition to Bono, includes Roger McNamee, Fred Anderson (formerly of Apple), Bret Pearlman, and Marc Bodnick as partners. ❖

Red Hat's New Service Extends Terms and Reduces Costs

In December, Red Hat gave its Red Hat Enterprise Linux customers a new maintenance option that extends service from six months to 18 months. Through the Extended Update Support (EUS) program, customers will be able to standardize their IT operations and run versions of Red Hat's Enterprise Linux for a longer time period. The EUS program will provide clients with updates and fixes for the Linux version they're running for the entire 18-month period so they won't have to update their applications or hardware or recertify their Linux version within that time. The cost for the EUS option will remain the same as the company's current maintenance programs, which vary depending on the number of computers. For example, maintenance for up to 100 computers starts at US$60,000; for up to 500 computers, the prices start at $80,000. Red Hat will continue to offer its current maintenance programs, however. Customers who prefer to keep their six-month update schedules won't be switched to EUS. ❖

Rack 'Em Up: Rackable Systems's Leasing Program for Data Center Equipment

California-based Rackable Systems launched its own leasing program for its data center equipment. Leasing options were previously only available through third-party vendors. The program, called Rackable Equipment Leasing (REL), let customers lease on a project-by-project basis with options to extend the lease term. The program offers full maintenance and financing. More information can be found on the company's Web site at www.rackable.com. ❖

Sharks vs. Jets: Virtualization Risks Divide Security and IT Pros

Ponemon Institute released the results of its 2009 Security Mega Trends Survey sponsored by Lumension Security that shows a significant wedge between information security and IT operations professionals over virtualization security. Roughly two-thirds of IT professionals don't think virtualization increases security risks, whereas nearly the same amount of security professionals feel the opposite. Both groups agree that the most important risk that virtualization does pose is the inability to identify and authenticate users across multiple systems.

The survey also looked at outsourcing, data breaches, mobile devices, cybercrime, cloud computing, P2P, and Web 2.0 as potential security threats in the next 12 to 24 months. For those in IT operations, outsourcing was the favorite, with 50 percent of the respondents citing it as the number one threat. However, IT security pros felt that cybercrime was the biggest threat. ❖

Microsoft Rids Phony Antivirus Software from PCs

Microsoft's December update of its Malicious Software Removal Tool removed a fake security application that's been making the rounds as "Antivirus XP," "AntivirusXP 2008," and "Antivirus 2009." Microsoft said that in the first nine days after the update, the tool erased the offending software from roughly 394,000 PCs. ❖

ZOMG! TXT MSG Bug

At the Chaos Communications Congress in Berlin, security researchers demonstrated a denial-of-service attack, dubbed the "Curse of Silence," against Nokia phones. The attack can originate from Nokia phones by setting the protocol identifier to "Internet Electronic Mail" and sending a specially formatted short messages service (SMS) message from a sender with a name length over 32 characters. Victimized phones will lock up and stop receiving text messages, but other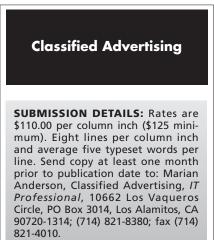wise continue to work. Because mobile networks send voicemail alerts by SMS, compromised phones might also stop alerting users to new voice messages.

The vulnerability affects Nokia Series 60 phone versions 2.6, 2.8, 3.0, and 3.1, as well as the Sony Ericsson UiQ. All run versions of the Symbian operating system.

Nokia hasn't issued a firmware fix at the time this issue went to press, but network operators should filter messages with TP-PID "Internet Electronic Mail" and email addresses with more than 32 characters. ❖