

# SUITES

# STAKE

IBM's Suites series aims to not only to do what SBS does... but do it better. By Roger Laing

If something works, it's worth copying. The price of Microsoft's success with Small Business Server is the arrival of a rival product from IBM currently codenamed Emerald.

To be launched later this year, it joins the IBM Suites series that's pitched in a head-to-head battle for the departmental server market. It is a growing market. Some four years ago only four per cent of products were sold under the BackOffice badge. Last year it had grown to 27 per cent. By the year 2000 IBM's estimate is that the NT market place will be worth \$30 billion, of which 20-25 per cent will be software, and they are hoping to grab a large slice of that pie.

What they are offering, they believe, is value-added NT. The products within the Suites are not new – indeed, say IBM, that's their advantage. They are drawn, in part, from technology like CICS used in the high Enterprise market where the virtues of availability, scalability and reliability are all important.

Their technology also runs across several platforms, so, for example, a DB2-based application can be scaled from the desktop through to a mainframe. The application is King, the platform secondary, to suit today's mixed site environments.

"[IBM's] Suite components have a track record of being robust, reliable and secure. They support many different operating systems, giving customers desired cross-platform scalability. And they are easy to buy, use and develop solutions around," says Dick Sullivan, vice-president of IBM solutions for Windows NT marketing.

The Suites are also part of IBM's global campaign, E-business, that aims to bring "Internet technologies together with core business systems," according to Dick Sullivan.

So what do you get? The basic NT suite, called accurately if not imaginatively, the IBM Suite for Windows NT, offers:

- DB2 Universal database
- Lotus' Domino Server to handle e-mail and messaging
- Intel's LANDesk to handle desktop systems management including remote problem-solving, server monitoring, software metering, and distribution and hardware and software inventory

■ eNetwork Communications Server to tap into legacy systems

■ ADSM (Adstar Distributed Storage Manager) to handle storage management across the network and cross-platform.

For large sites the Enterprise edition adds TXSeries transaction support, MQSeries message queuing, enhanced data-accessibility tools and Tivoli LAN Access software to integrate LAN management software with the enterprise-level Tivoli management software. The small business suite, for up to 100 users, will include just the Lotus Domino Intranet Starter pack, incorporating messaging and faxing capabilities, and the DB2 database.

So what are the differences? They're evident, reply IBM, right from the start with the installation of the product. With BackOffice questions are asked throughout the installation process so it can't be done unattended. "It is necessary to reboot the machine about five times," says Pat Gibney, Windows NT system manager for IBM. "With the IBM Suites there is one reboot. We have factored out redundant questions in the installation procedure and the others come up front to make installing and configuring much easier."

More suspect though is the question of integration. The fact that even as the first two suites (departmental and enterprise editions) were launched in May, we're being told version two will feature greater integration between the suites' components, smacks of the technology catching up with a good marketing ploy. In fact the release has been moved back to the first quarter of '99 when we can expect a browser-based administration tool with the same interface across all the products in the suites and integrated directory services, providing a single sign-on and distributed security. It won't replace NT5's much-anticipated Active Directory, but it will extend the same services across multiple systems.

## Product choice

The rival suites also have a different bias through the products that are packaged within them. For example, in the department suite IBM's offering is ranged up against Exchange Server for e-mail and

## Small business server

groupware, SNA Server for mainframe connectivity, SQL Server for database, and SMS for network management and administration.

While there is no Microsoft product to fully compete with ADSM's range of backup services the web services offered in Big Blue's suites are not as extensive as those provided by IIS4, Site Server 3 and proxy server. At the enterprise level, IBM offer a more scalable, cross-platform solution, though in terms of transaction and messaging services, at a greater financial cost than the Redmond offerings.

### Pricing

The picture gets more confusing as the two companies have different pricing structures. BackOffice is sold on a single-server licence, so if individual products are put on separate servers, as is likely, further licences are needed. Under the IBM pricing structure individual applications can be installed on servers anywhere on the network.

Where IBM do have a clear advantage is that they offer one-stop shopping – not only can they supply the products to work with NT, they also manufacture the hardware to run it and the service support.

Their stated goal is to have 20 per cent market share of NT-based solutions and services by the start of the new Millennium. For the moment, they are leaving the NT operating system to Microsoft although they are closely involved in helping shape the future of NT5. They have invested \$100m in the Kirkland Programming Centre, a few miles from Microsoft's Redmond Headquarters.

They are in the curious position, echoed throughout much of the IT industry, of being both partner and competitor. "We're partners on the Win 32 API and below. We compete above that," says Pat Gibney, Windows NT system manager for IBM.

As the biggest ISV for NT, IBM's Kirkland labs are part of the NT5 early adopters programme that Microsoft calls the FirstWave. They have more than 500 developers using the NT5 beta, with builds refreshed every six weeks. "We have an excellent technical relationship built on mutual respect (the technology's good), mutual interest (making the most of NT) and a healthy dose of paranoia (very strict NDAs)," declares Pat. IBM are also feeding back their views on NT5 which, believes Pat Gibney, won't be shipping until second quarter '99. Even then, it's likely to be a post-new Millennium rollout. "What company's going to convert to NT5 with Y2K coming up," asks Pat? It is an issue with all major new software rollouts – suites included. ●

### Costs:

- IBM Suite for Windows NT – \$2,499 per suite plus \$225 per desktop client
- The IBM Enterprise Suite for Windows NT – £10,474 per suite plus £242 per desktop client
- Microsoft BackOffice suite – £2,100 with 25 client licences



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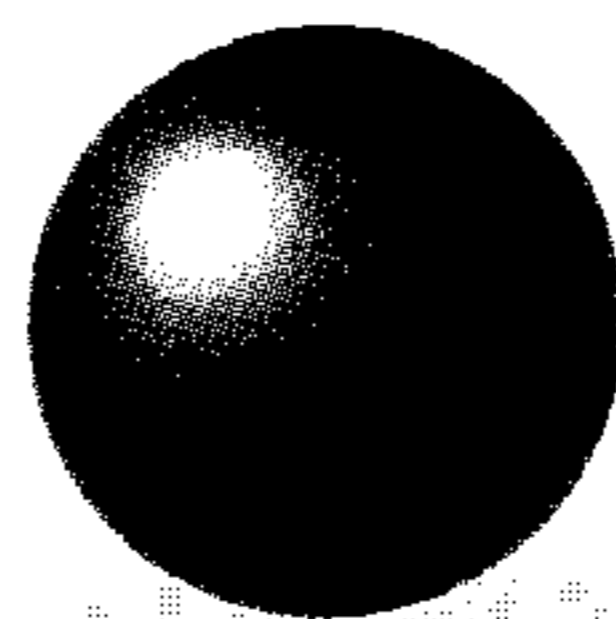
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