BACKGROUND ON BUSINESS

Engineers Take High-End Computing Power To The Ends Of The Earth

(NAPSA)—It's all too easy to imagine: a Category 3 hurricane is spinning in the warm waters off of Florida's Atlantic coast, and local residents are bracing for the worst by stocking up on supplies or getting out of town. Entire counties grind to a halt in preparation for the storm—but how are local governments and major corporations up and down the Eastern Seaboard preparing for its aftermath?

In the wake of Katrina and other recent disasters, citizens, business and government alike have a new appreciation for preparedness. Some of the most valuable (and toughest) services to restore after a disaster relate to information and communications. These are essential for rescue workers, hospitals and security forces to lay the groundwork for general recovery. In devastated areas, hospital and police computer centers will have been destroyed, and cell phones are inadequate for addressing the situation—if they work. How to fill the void?

California-based Sun Microsystems has moved to address this demand with a new concept called "Project Blackbox." The concept packages computing, storage and network infrastructure, along with high-efficiency power and cooling, in a standard shipping container. This full-scale, corporate-grade datacenter is designed to be rapidly and flexibly deployed anytime, anywhere.

The project is also aimed at businesses that have an ongoing need for datacenter space, yet don't have the time or resources to design and build it. Server rooms require extensive power and air-conditioning infrastructure, and some older buildings (many in the heart of major cities) are simply not wired or designed to accommodate servers. This easy-to-deploy datacenter solves this problem immediately. Military applications also seem obvious, for use on the battlefield, short-term foreign bases and on naval vessels, for example.

A portable Blackbox has been developed that can be dropped anywhere and used as an almost instant datacenter after it is plugged in. This is welcome news to devastated areas, hospitals and police computer centers, and businesses.

Sun sees market opportunities in serving not just large corporations and universities with supplemental datacenter capacity, but also in bringing computing power to the populations of developing countries. A Blackbox and a support container with a generator and chiller could be dropped at a school, or anywhere in a developing country, to provide an almost instant datacenter. The datacenter would then perform just as it would in a Silicon Valley hosting facility. Without regular, grid-based power and cooling (unreliable in many emerging economies), a conventional datacenter could never be built in such a setting.

Sun estimates that customers will be able to easily acquire and deploy a complete "plug and play" modular datacenter in 1/10th the time it takes to build a traditional datacenter, deploying in a matter of weeks versus the years it takes to build a datacenter from the ground up. Based on Sun's calculations, the portable datacenter will cost 1/100th of the initial cost of a traditional 10,000-square-foot datacenter, and 1/5th the cost per square foot, as well as be 20 percent more efficient.